

TRASHMOUTH TOZIER

HOSPITALIZED IN KANSAS CITY!



Awake My Soul by Koryandr

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti)

Genre: Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism, Background Bill/Audra, Canon-Typical Violence, Character is forcibly outed, Closeted Character, Coming Out, Drug Abuse, Drug Use, Hate Crimes, Homophobia, Homophobic Language, Internalized Homophobia, M/M, Medical, Mental Health Issues, Post-IT Chapter Two (2019), Recreational Drug Use, Richie and Eddie are just having a rough time atm, Sexuality Crisis, background Stan/Patty, background ben/bev, just off screen, kind of, the other losers are too

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Urus

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-11-17

Updated: 2019-11-29

Packaged: 2019-12-19 02:12:20

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 8

Words: 41,743

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Trashmouth Tozier Hospitalized in Kansas City

TMZ - 2 Hours Ago

Sources say that Richie Tozier was admitted late last night to the Emergency Room at Saint Luke's in Kansas City, MO. At this time it is unclear the cause of the Comedian's hospital visit. Stay tuned for more updates!

1. How fickle my heart and how woozy my eyes

Author's Note:

Okay! So this isn't as depressing as the tags make it seem lmao, they're just going through a lot and I wanted to tag for any possible triggers, so **read the tags carefully**. FYI This does have a happy ending, but I'll put specific trigger warnings in the footnotes of each chapter.

Rating is mature based on the mature content. The content is serious, but it's nothing gratuitous (looking at you Stephen King) so It shouldn't be too triggering, but proceed with caution. It's just two old broken dudes (and five other broken people) helping each other through the world. This fic does include a lot of social media posts and I've also made some rough sketches for things like Instagram photos and articles posted.

This is the first long fic I've ever finished so I'm excited to be uploading it, and it has kind of become my baby at this point. It's complete and we're looking at 8 chapters approx 35k, and each chapter seems to be longer than the last. I hope you all enjoy. <3

TRASHMOUTH TOZIER

HOSPITALIZED IN
KANSAS CITY!**Trashmouth Tozier Hospitalized in Kansas City***TMZ - 2 Hours Ago*

Sources say that Richie Tozier was admitted late last night to the Emergency Room at Saint Luke's in Kansas City, MO. At this time it is unclear the cause of the Comedian's hospital visit. Tozier performed at the Kansas City Rep earlier in the night and audience members confirm his behavior seemed normal. In the past, Tozier has been public about his substance abuse issues involving cocaine and alcohol. Has the Comedian relapsed? Stay tuned for more updates!

TrashStan @trashstan: @TMZ please say sike

Richie's Girlfriend @trashstanclub: @TMZ I'm serious, you better be fucking with me.

Yvian @yvian_013: @TMZ you said he relapsed last year and he was fine so?? Stfu?

TylerGrace @TybyGrace: @TMZ, I was at the show tonight. He was perfectly fine, signed autographs afterwards and everything whatever it is happened after.

Eddie sits in the uncomfortable hospital armchair, leg bouncing, phone shaking between his fingers. Messages are coming into the group chat faster than he can answer them, he's got Richie's phone, screen cracked in an intricate fractal, sitting next to him and lighting up like a fucking christmas tree.

He goes to run his hand over his face, forgetting about the cuts there, and hisses when he touches the swollen skin. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. He's not hooked up to his own monitors anymore, the nurses have disinfected him, stitched him up, and helped clean some of the blood off.

Of course, that was after they had someone come in with a professional-grade camera and take photos of every exposed fucking inch of his skin. "It's evidence," they said. He understands. Really. But the photographer entered in the middle of Eddie having a panic attack, so he really can't be held accountable for anything he may have screamed. The nurses gave him an Ativan for the anxiety and Morphine to manage the pain while they treated him.

He's gonna have some more scars to join the one on his left cheek

from Bowers.

Fuck. fuckfuckfuck.

Eddie's phone buzzes in his hand with an incoming call.

Steve.

Fuck

FUCK

"Edward Kaspbrak speaking," he answers his phone dumbly. Of course Steve fucking knows it's him. He says as much too.

"Eddie I know it's you. Who the fuck else would it be?" Steve grumbles, "How's he doing?"

"Still unconscious, but he's stable and everything, we're just waiting for him to wake up." Eddie closed his eyes. "They won't uh...they can't tell me much, since we're not married and Richie's unconscious. I'm his Emergency Contact though, they should...fuck. I think they're trying to get his records transferred over from back home for the fucking HIPPA release."

"Okay. Look, The staff there know he's famous right? Has Dee talked to them?"

"Yea," Eddie interrupts, "We're in a private room."

"Good, cause TMZ just fucking posted that he's in the hospital there, so if you're planning on leaving for anything, prepare for the paparazzi."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Eddie groans. Something flashes out of the corner of his eye, but it's just another text notification from Richie's phone.

"Fucking scumbags. Anyway, I'm gonna keep an eye on things here. Do you like, need anything or...?" Steve's gruff voice trails off. Eddie's way too tired for this.

"I'm...I'll be okay."

"Sounds good man," Steve grumbles something to someone on the phone next to him. "We're gonna work on a press release in the morning once we know more, cause the going rumor right now is that he OD'd which is not the publicity we want out there. I'd offer to leave your name out, but once the media gets the police records, it's gonna be out there anyway."

"Yea um...okay. What are...what are we going to tell them?" Eddie's voice is smaller than he's heard it in months, and he's practically bent in half over his knees, free hand on the back of his neck.

"He was just meeting a friend for dinner, Eddie."

"Yea but...won't they find out?"

"I don't see how they would." Steve drops the false bravado for a moment, just a fucking moment. "None of it has to be public record, you guys were jumped, it's assault, that's all that matters to them."

Eddie nods along with him, forgetting Steve can't see him. There's a moment of silence before Steve asks if he's still there and Eddie hums along.

"Alright Ed, keep us updated. Dee just texted, said she's clearing things up with the police now and she'll be back soon. If you need anything just call."

Eddie disconnects the call and sets his phone down for a moment. His head is foggy from the morphine, and the ativan is muting it but he's still so anxious he can't sit still. He pulls up the group chat when he gets the buzz of a new message.

Losers Club

Bev

Are you sure you don't want me to fly out??

Mike

Keep us updated, Eddie. We love you guys. <3

Stan

If he's still unconscious in the morning I'm flying in

This was just supposed to be a quick show; it's not even a fucking tour, just a few scattered shows around the midwest. Kansas City was the second to last and Eddie flew out for the weekend and they were supposed to just spend time together in Denver after the show. This wasn't supposed to happen. Eddie didn't plan for this.

Richie's nurse comes in after a while, checks Eddie's blood pressure, and his heart before moving onto Richie. Before he realizes it, Eddie's standing up and walking up to the opposite side of Richie's hospital bed.

"He's okay, right?" Eddie asks, earning himself a pitying glance from the nurse.

"Yea, actually, the papers just got transferred over. We have the HIPPA release, so the doctor's gonna come in here to explain all of it to you, okay?" Elijah, the nurse, flashes Eddie a kind smile that he doesn't fucking deserve because forty minutes ago Eddie was yelling at him. Elijah sets a hand on Eddie's shoulder. "He's fine, just like I've been telling you, we just gotta wait for him to wake up now."

"Mr. Kaspbrak?" Their doctor is standing in the entryway to the room. "How are you feeling?"

"Oh I'm fine, just a fucking migraine. How's Rich?" Eddie crosses his arms over his chest, only wincing a little at the gesture. Dr. Kahli is a short woman, golden brown skin, dark hair twisted up on her head and a serious expression on her face, she gives Eddie a once-over, and then gestures for him to sit in the arm chair.

"Eddie, you're still in shock, I want you to sit down and let the medicine do its job. Let's get a cot in here so you can rest while we wait for Richie to wake up."

"You'd have to fucking knock me out if you want me to rest at this point." Eddie shakes his head back and forth. "I...it's not gonna happen until I know he's okay. It's the anxiety, it's just...it's not gonna happen."

She asks Elijah to bring them a shock blanket, water, and another sedative for Eddie, even though he tries to protest it. She turns to him and pulls up Richie's chart.

"Okay, so like we've been telling you, he's going to be fine." Eddie must be a hot fucking mess if she's smiling at him to placate him, "I'm sure you know most of this, but his nose is broken, various abrasions and bruising, he's got a cracked rib and bruising on three others. The index and pointer finger on his left hand is broken, and it's likely he has a concussion, but we won't know for sure until he wakes up."

Eddie takes a deep breath, trying not to think about everything she just said. He assumed most of it, but hearing it confirmed steals the breath from his lungs. Eddie wishes he could act normal right now, he wants to be calm and cool and keep track of all of Richie's injuries. He wants to be in control but Richie's unconscious in a fucking hospital bed covered in blood and he can't-

"Do we know why he isn't waking up?" Eddie asks, somehow maintaining eye contact with her.

"My guess? He's got a severe concussion, and he's in pain. We gave him some medication to make him comfortable, his body just needs some time to recover. I'm guessing we'll see him wake up here in the next hour or so, but again, that's just a guess."

She leaves him with the shock blanket and a comforting hand on his shoulder. The sedative does its job, and soon Eddie finds himself slumped over the side of Richie's bed, earning himself a crick in his neck and back. He's got Richie's hand held loosely in his own, and is dozing off when he feels something in his hair.

Eddie shoots up too fast and whips his head around to look at Richie. He looks so fucking bad, but his eyes well up with tears just at the fucking sight of those stupid blue eyes. Richie's face is swollen, both of his eyes are purple with bruising, and the left one is bloodshot. Most of the blood was cleaned up off of his face but he's got a couple stitched up gashes as well as a nose brace.

"Rich," Eddie breathes, grabbing onto his hand and pressing a kiss to

the busted knuckles there. “God you scared the shit out of me.”

Richie turns his palm over so he can run his thumb against the underside of Eddie’s jaw. Richie looks at him, eyes trailing over the stitches and the road rash down the side of his face. He doesn’t linger long on the bruising, and he seems a little distant, but still concerned

“I’m okay, Rich. You got the worst of it, you showoff.” The tension in Eddie’s shoulders loosens a bit when Richie smiles sleepily at him.

“I can’t see you so I don’t know who you are, but don’t tell my boyfriend you’re kissin on me, he’ll be jealous.” Eddie’s never been more relieved to be fucking *exasperated* at this man. He rolls his eyes, laughing, and drops Richie’s hand to grab the broken glasses from the bedside table. He’s careful around the nose brace as he slides them on, and Richie blinks as much as he can through his swollen eyes. Brushing Richie’s curls away from his swollen face, Eddie presses a kiss to an unblemished spot on Richie’s cheek.

“I love you.” he says to him quietly, hand still in Richie’s hair, their faces just inches apart. Richie looks up into Eddie’s eyes and nods, “me too.”

Notes for the Chapter:

TW: Medical Discussions and Injuries

2. I struggle to find any truth in your lies

Comedian Richie “Trashmouth” Tozier Hospitalized Following Brutal Assault

NPR - 4 hours ago

It was rumoured late last night, following an article posted by TMZ that Richie Tozier, resident LA Comedian, was hospitalized. It has since been confirmed by both the Kansas City Police Department, as well as the comedian's agency.

“Mr. Tozier left the theatre following his show and decided to take a short walk to a nearby restaurant where he was meeting a friend for dinner, cutting down an alley to avoid being spotted. The two met outside the restaurant in the alley when three unknown assailants attacked them. The Kansas City Police Department is investigating the assault...” said the Police Chief in a written statement released on the department's Facebook page this morning.

“Mr. Tozier has been admitted to the hospital for his injuries but is in good condition and expected to make a full recovery soon, along with the other victim.” the Comedian's agent has confirmed in a statement released on the Comedian's Twitter account.



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TRASHMOUTH [I LIVED, BITCH](#)

BILL DENBROUGH GLAD TO SEE YOU'RE BACK TO NORMAL, RICH.

DELIUH OMG I'M SO FUKING GLAD YOU'RE DEAD!

RAWBACK TITLE OF YOUR NEXT NETFLIX SPECIAL? LOL!



74,563 likes

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#1! Trash Stan @TrashStanClub : @BevMarsh aren't you friends with @Trashmouth why haven't you said anything yet, is he actually okay!?!?

God Tier Girlfriend @hariku_mei: a sexist (borderline homophobic) white cishet comedian gets the shit beat out of him and I'm supposed to care? #Trashmouth

Idiot Werewolf @idioto: @hariku_mei I mean, you're allowed not to like his comedy but did you see the picture? Nobody deserves that for bad jokes

Daddy? Do I look @tosser_02: love that nobody cares about whoever the fuck his friend is that also got attacked lmao #Trashmouth

Richie's Girlfriend @trashstanclub: @Tosser_02 yea weird they haven't even said their name?? Maybe a girlfriend?

“This is not gonna work.” Eddie said, turning the sunglasses over in his hand.

“Eddie, trust me, this is your best bet.” Dee, Richie’s road manager, said tossing a hoodie at him. She’s been with Richie longer than Eddie, and works directly with Steve. “Put that on and pull the hood up. We’ll keep you hidden.”

“We don’t have to do this.” Eddie said under his breath but he put the hoodie on, zipping it up the front right up to his neck. “I can just show my face, it doesn’t matter. Paparazzi have photographed us together before.”

“Ed, no.” Richie walked over to Eddie and pulled the hoodie up over his head, brushing a strand of hair off of Eddie’s forehead. “They’re gonna be all over this for the next couple weeks, let’s just lay low and then we’ll be back to normal, you don’t need them plastering your face all over twitter.”

Eddie pouts, and Richie can’t resist the urge to press a kiss to his lips. They both wince.

“Fucking idiot, we’ve both got split lips.” Eddie grumbles, but lets Richie wrap his arms around his shoulders and draw him close to put his chin on Eddie’s head. Eddie’s still got his arms crossed between their bodies.

“Adorable, honestly.” Dee says sarcastically,

Richie turns his head towards her and sticks his tongue out. She throws something at Richie and he flinches away, angling Eddie behind him and laughing.

Eddie puts the sunglasses on gently so as not to disturb his stitches. Getting out of the hospital is an absolute clusterfuck. Richie doesn’t cover up at all, and Dee only puts sunglasses on, but Eddie covers up from head-to-fucking-toe. The paparazzi aren’t the worst, but there’s

certainly a crowd gathered outside the hospital exit. Dee and Richie keep Eddie nestled between them, Dee with a hand on his back guiding him and Richie with an arm over his shoulder. Richie grips Eddie's hood, keeping it pulled down to conceal his face.

Eddie's hasn't quite gotten used to people taking photos of them, but it's really the yelling that disturbs him. It's like hitting a wall of noise that completely surrounds and consumes you. It's overwhelming. They get Eddie in the car first, Dee rounds to the driver's seat and Richie stays outside of the car to speak to the reporters. Eddie keeps his head turned away but tries to listen through the door.

"...we're okay, thank you for the concern but I really just want to go to my hotel and take my codeine so I'm gonna leave. -- None of your fucking business buddy, have a good one." Richie flips the cameras off and slides into the car.

As soon as they get into Eddie and Richie's hotel room, Richie collapses on the bed, Dee sitting next to him. Eddie grabs his toiletry bag from the corner and disappears into the bathroom, grumbling the whole way. *"Haven't brushed my teeth in 30 fucking hours."*

Richie closes his eyes, taking a deep breath and fucking regretting it because of the pull on his ribs. His whole body aches, from head to toe and all he wants to do is sink into the bed and never get up. Dee hits his thigh and hands him an overpriced bottle of water from the mini fridge and two pills.

"How you doin, man?" She asks him.

"Just got the shit beat out of me but like, it really only rates a four on a scale of all the fucked up shit I've seen." Richie lays back once the pills are down. "I really just want a nap."

"Well, you do look like shit, Rich." She sits down next to him, leg pressed up against his own. He looks down his chest at her.

"Thank you for the news flash. Whatever would I do without you?" He nudges her, causing her to chuckle.

"Probably would have OD'd in your mid-thirties." she arches a brow

at him.

“Touche.”

When Eddie returns, he switches the AC on in the room to drown out the deafening silence and then takes his blood-stained clothes and folds them neatly into one of the plastic dry-cleaning bags from the closet.

“Rich, get out of those clothes.”

“Eds please, we’ve got company.” Richie moans, “‘m comfy don’t wanna.”

“Strip.” Dee helps Richie get up, and together she gets Richie’s shirt off and Eddie works at his jeans. “Jesus how fast does that medicine affect you, dude?”

“You were in the bathroom for like, an hour!” Richie says.

“Ten minutes, tops!”

“Boys.” Dee chides, standing up, “I’m gonna head back to my hotel room. Richie, take a nap, but I need a decision on the Denver show before noon. If we need to cancel, it sucks but we’ll cancel. Don’t want you publicly bombing another show only a year after the last one.”

“Yea, fuck you too, Dee.” Richie rolls over, throwing an arm over his face. “I’ll text.”

“Richie, you are not doing the fucking Denver show tonight,” Eddie rolls his eyes, tugging Richie’s socks and shoes off, but Richie just groans in response.

“Let me know, boys.” Dee says, exiting the hotel room.

Eddie leaves the shoes by Richie’s open suitcase and the bloody socks go into the bag with the rest of their soiled clothes. He contemplates for a moment if they should even bring the bloody clothes home or just pitch them. Should he try and get the stains out? Will he ever want to wear these clothes again? ...can he actually throw them

away? His hands begin to shake around the plastic.

He sets them, wrapped tight in plastic, in Richie's suitcase and then changes into a loose t-shirt. Eddie takes two pills from his own prescription, washes them down with the water from Richie's bottle, and then settles in bed next to him.

This...thing between them is still tentative and nervous. They didn't get together right away, not even close. Eddie went home to Myra, and tried to return to his normal life, he really did. It was just a phase. He's gone through phases like this before, where he felt like he was living someone else's life, but Myra always talked him back ("*You're being irrational, Eddie*", "*I am your wife, why would you hurt me like this?*" "*Nobody's ever going to love you like I can.*") But this time was different. He went home, explained away his wounds, and tried to go to work on Monday. He got his Escalade fixed, he worked on that big review due for a new client, he went grocery shopping and cooked their vegan dinners. He was miserable.

Everything felt wrong. Every touch from Myra, every shared meal, every moment spent in their home felt like a fucking facade. He pulled as much overtime as he could at work until he got a nasty email from HR telling him he was violating labor laws. Then he spent all of his time in his office at home. He stayed away because when he didn't *see her* he could pretend like everything *was* fine. He could pretend his skin didn't crawl when she said "*Eddie, say you love me.*" If he hid himself away he could pretend like his entire worldview wasn't crumbling down around him.

When the nightmares got so bad they woke up Myra, they got in an explosive argument that ended with him getting a therapist. In the weirdest turn of events, *she's* the one that didn't want him to go. It had started as a joking suggestion, but when she immediately shot it down, he got defensive. He was so insistent about it, this menial thing he didn't even really care about, that she eventually backed down. Eddie had to excuse himself to the bathroom for a hysterical laughing fit. It felt *so good* . It was a stupid argument and he didn't even want to see a therapist but he stood his ground and it felt *good*.

He tried a male therapist at first, a handsome man with pride flags strung up like crown moulding, but no matter how nice he was, Eddie

sat on pins and needles waiting for him to make fun of him, waiting for him to call him a pussy or laugh at him. He couldn't get out much more than a stuttered explanation of his "life story" in front of the guy. He left the appointments more anxious than calm. It was actually that therapist's suggestion that he try someone else "It's okay for things not to work out. We need to do what's going to be best for you, and I think Marina might be better for you than me."

He was right. He sat in front of her and talked about his Mother (trauma he forgot he had to process) and Myra. And she didn't judge him, she didn't pity him, she was actually rather stoic. She wasn't as outwardly kind as the guy had been, instead she was succinct, calm, and logical and Eddie *liked her*. She was kind to him when he was hard on himself, and applied logic to things he had trouble dealing with. A month into their appointments, she handed him a print out with things Myra has said to him next to a detailed breakdown of gaslighting behavior. He skipped the next appointment, but that's when he began to think of every "*say you love me*" as an attack, and every "*Eddie it's not safe*" as something weighing him down at the bottom of a deep dark ocean. He cried in their next appointment and afterwards ran a bath and broke down on the phone with Bev over it.

He woke up in the middle of the night following a vivid dream of his mother and Pennywise and got out of bed. He grabbed a portfolio from his office, and then went into their safe and sorted all of his documents out from Myra's: birth certificates, deeds in his name, hospital records, passports and ID's. He went through every document he may need, put it into his work bag and then returned everything else to it's correct spot before heading back to bed.

He didn't leave that night, he didn't leave that week even, but he had all of those papers ready and waiting in his bag for if he did decide to leave. "It's a step, and it's not a commitment." Marina had said when he told her about it.

He called Stan the following week at an ungodly hour, earning a tongue lashing for it. "My wife controls our finances and um...I'm worried about...I don't know if I'm going to leave but if I do, I want to put money aside?" Stan didn't need much more prompting after that, and stayed up with him until Eddie had a to-do list including

removing her as an authorized user on his personal and savings accounts.

They separated three months after Derry, and Eddie got a place of his own for the next three while the divorce finalized. He needed the alone time, honestly, and he hadn't lived alone since college. It was really nice at first, and once he worked past the odd loneliness, it was like he became a fucking *person* again.

He started going for drinks with his coworkers, he watched TV while he cooked dinner, and he would leave dishes out to wash the next morning without feeling guilty. He did the things Myra never liked, openly did the things he would previously have to hide from her. He could order takeout on a weekday if he was too busy to cook and the only voice judging him for his choices and the *trans fats and carbs in that Eddie-bear* was the one in his head. He kept beer in the fridge, and put his feet up on the coffee table and felt rebellious whenever he didn't use a coaster.

It wasn't always peachy. He'd have episodes where he had to bleach his apartment from floor to ceiling, he cooked chicken incorrectly once and then refused to eat meat for a week. He forgot to check the expiration date on his milk and cried when he went to use it and it was spoiled. It was the simple things, like forgetting to buy more toilet paper that wrecked him. He never had to do those things on his own. Myra would keep track of things like that around the house, and his mother beforehand. He struggled with living alone, but Marina said it was good for him. It *felt* good, even on the bad days.

At first glance, it seemed like things were a little easier for Richie, he didn't have to deal with a divorce, and he was in therapy long before their little reunion. Richie finished his tour dates, and then went back to LA and cancelled all plans for the foreseeable future. He'd send their snapchat group videos of the beach outside his home. Bev and Bill were keeping tabs on Richie, and Eddie would talk to him outside of the group chat as well, but there was something off about him during that time.

He'd later figure out it was all of the alcohol, drugs, and partying he was doing. Eddie got a rather distressed phone call from Bill one night close to the end of his divorce proceedings about it. Eddie took

a week off of work (he had months worth of PTO saved up) and flew out to stay with Richie in his ridiculous fucking beach house. He did a thorough clean from top to bottom, cleaned out old clothes from his closet, fed him clean food for a few days, and tried not to freak the fuck out about the used needles and drug paraphernalia he found around the house.

"I don't do the hard stuff, Ed, don't worry." Richie had said when they pulled the first used needle out from the ratty old couch cushions, "I've been having all sorts of people here."

"Rich, I'm serious, you can be honest with me, I'm already freaking out you can't freak me out more. We're throwing this couch out, by the way, I hope you like furniture shopping." Eddie said. Richie already had to give him a xanax earlier when they started deep cleaning, it seemed physically impossible to have a panic attack in that moment.

"I don't fucking do heroin, Eddie." Riche grumbled, "Worst thing I do is coke, relax."

"You do cocaine?!"

As the divorce was being finalized, and Richie was still struggling, Eddie talked to his boss about working remotely for a bit so he could take care of Richie. He didn't need to *take care* of him, Richie was an adult. But Eddie was...excruciatingly lonely, and it seemed isolation led to Richie making dumb decisions, so cohabitation would be mutually beneficial. And truth be told, he missed the presence of another person, he couldn't remember a time where he wasn't with someone. He missed eating meals with someone and going shopping together and watching shows. Maybe he did need someone to share space with, but Richie needed someone too. (He'd end up transferring down to the Malibu Office.)

Their *thing* didn't start formally, it's not like they asked each other out like blushing teenagers. But it started out as the little things. They were both struggling with this new idea of sexuality, let alone the freedom of it. It was Richie's hand at Eddie's back, Eddie holding Richie when he went through withdrawals, Richie buying skim milk because he knew Eddie liked that best. It was a lingering glance when

Eddie would come out of the bathroom, or Eddie's hand tightening around a glass when Richie stumbled in the kitchen in his boxers. It was the delightful flush across Richie's freckled cheeks when Eddie would let Richie put his feet in his lap while they watched television.

They gravitated towards one another like magnets, and slowly their friendship turned into something more, and more, and then...they both ended up talking to their therapists about it. Richie wasn't sure what he was, and Eddie struggled with the idea of being gay since he did spend most of his life sleeping with a woman. "That happens all the time." Jamilla, his LA therapist said, "it's perfectly normal. You're allowed to change, there's no statute of limitations on when you can discover your sexuality. The world is heteronormative, it told you that was normal, you were just doing what you thought was right." All of these phrases lingered in the back of his mind. He'd think about them when Richie would roll his sleeves up and got his hands dirty digging for shells on the beach, when Richie's fingers, rough with age, would brush against his skin. He'd have to think back on her words when he got hard thinking about Richie and then locked himself in the bathroom to work through a panic attack.

One night, after a dinner they made together, they were lounging on Richie's back porch and watching the sun set on the ocean when Richie spoke it first. It wasn't an admission of sexuality, it wasn't 'I'm gay' or 'I'm bi' or any of the other umbrella terms Eddie had exhausting himself trying to research. It was simple: "I think I'm in love with you."

That was good enough for Eddie. It was perfect really. He didn't have to figure it out right away, they didn't have to label, they didn't have to permanently assign themselves to terms that scared them. All they had to know was that they loved one-another, and there was no doubt in his mind that he loved him. That was more than either of them had ever had before. It was more than enough.

"Me too."

Notes for the Chapter:

TW: Mention of Drug use, gaslighting, emotional abuse, sexuality crisis and a crudely drawn photo of

Richie's injuries.

Your response to this fic has made me so happy so far! Thank you to everyone who is reading and commenting, it's so encouraging to see so many people interested in this. <3

3. And now my heart stumbles on things I don't know

Summary for the Chapter:

Thank you to everyone that's reading! Please know I read every comment and if you ask a question I'll likely respond. You can also message me on tumblr if you want to :)

Lmao at me, doubling my word count with one chapter.

Who is Trashmouth's mysterious friend? 7 Convincing Fan theories from Twitter

Buzzfeed News - 3 hours ago

Richie Tozier, was seen leaving the hospital with a manager and an unknown companion yesterday morning. The unknown man is likely the second victim from Tozier's assault. He was seen wearing a hoodie with Tozier helping him conceal his face from photographers by holding his hood up and blocking photographers. Twitter is, of course, going wild with theories on his identity, see our favorite fan theories below!



Sara's Clubhouse @Sara_smiles: Wearing a Tangled hoodie to hide from the paps is a big mood honestly *#Trashmouth #WhoIsHe?*

January Embers @BevMarsh: Look. Richie and our friend are fine. Stop asking, stop following them, stop trying to photograph them. Richie will update when he's feeling better. Respect their privacy. *#Trashmouth*

Metali-duh @Headrop: *@Trashmouth* are you still doing the show in Denver tonight? No update yet from Ticketmaster.

Four-LoCo @Fourcapo: *@Headrop* dude, i'm sure that's the least of his worries right now

Metali-duh @Headrop: *@Fourcapo* Well I paid a couple hundred dollars for tickets, so It's my worry right now *#asshole*

“Richie, I’m fucking serious, we’re going home, call Steve and cancel the show.” Eddie shouted, shoving their clothes into the open suitcases on the bed.

“Eddie, I’m doing the fucking show.” Richie shouts back from the bathroom, accompanied by the sound of their shampoo bottles clattering to the bottom of the shower.

“Rich,” Eddie practically growls. He has to take a moment to breathe so he won’t fucking scream. *Breathe. One. Two. Three. Four. Five.* Eddie sets the clothes down and walks over to the bathroom door. “This isn’t a joke. You have two cracked ribs, a broken nose, and a serious concussion. You’re hurt, you need to go home and rest.”

“Eddie.” Richie blows some stray curls off of his face, standing up, his arms laden with their toiletries. “I love you, dude, but I’m an adult and I can make my own decisions.”

“Do not call me ‘dude’ when we’re fighting.” Eddie bitches back, grabbing the bottles from Richie’s arms. “And I know you’re an adult, which is why I don’t understand why you’re making such a childish decision.”

“It’s not fucking childish--!” Richie’s shout is interrupted by a heavy knock at their hotel room door. They glance at one another. They aren’t expecting anyone. When Richie confirmed he was doing Denver, Dee went ahead of them or organize the venue. Eddie hands the shampoo back to Richie and goes to look out the peephole of the door. He doesn’t recognize the man and woman standing there, but they look professionally dressed.

“Can I help you?” Eddie says through the door. The woman, shorter than the man, looks up, startled, but reaches into her jacket and pulls out a wallet.

“My name is Detective Juliano and this is my partner Detective Johnson, we’re looking to speak with Mr. Tozier and Mr. Kaspbrak.” She hold the badge up so he can see it through the peephole. The male detective seems bored at most. Eddie cracks the door open,

latch still in place so they can't shove themselves in, and holds his hand out. The woman looks to her partner before shrugging and handing it over. Eddie twists it in under the low light. It looks real enough, has the badge number and department written clearly on it.

"Ed, just let them in." Eddie can't see it but he can *hear* Richie rolling his eyes.

"Fuck off." Eddie spit back, closing the door to unhook the latch. He hands the badge back to the female detective and steps aside to let them in. Richie throws the shampoo into the sink and walks out of the bathroom wiping his hands on his pants. Eddie closes his eyes and takes a breath to prevent himself from murdering Richie in front of cops.

Richie shakes their hands in the entryway and then gestures for them to enter the hotel room. "Well, I'm Richie. The small bitchy one here is Edward."

"Rich, I swear to god." Eddie snaps, slamming the lid of the suitcase closed and spinning around, "Can you *not* , for like, five fucking minutes?!" Eddie sees the two detectives share a look. *Breathe* . Eddie covers his face for a moment and then shoulds his way past all three of them, slamming the bathroom door closed behind himself.

"We interrupting something?" The Detective Johnson asks, picking up Eddie's pill organizer off the nightstand and observing it. Richie sits on the edge of the bed.

"Hey, can you put that down?" Richie gestures towards the container and the detective sets it down, holding his hands up in an apology. "Yea, no. He gets like this when he's upset, he just needs a minute."

"Must be a very stressful situation." Detective Juliano says, smiling down at Richie.

"Yea, that's one way to describe it." Richie scoffs, clearing his throat. "What can I do for you?"

"We just want to get some more information about what happened last night." Detective Johnson says. He's a tall balding white man,

probably only a little older than Richie himself, whereas Detective Juliano is a short, young, Latina woman. Her standing up doesn't bother Richie, but Detective Johnson standing over him makes his skin crawl.

"Okay, can you please sit down or something, you're stressing me out." The detective gives his partner a look before rolling his eyes and backing up to sit on the arm of the couch.

"I already explained to the officers what happened last night when I spoke with them." Eddie says, stepping out of the bathroom with a pink face, drying his hands off with a fluffy white towel. Richie smiles over his shoulder at Eddie, and Eddie gives him a tight smile in return, looking down at his hands.

"Right, well you know this is a pretty serious case. The media's looking for answers so we're being asked to investigate this more thoroughly." Detective Juliano says kindly, taking out a notebook. "Do you mind?"

"Yes I-"

"No, we don't mind." Richie says over Eddie, sharing a look with him. Eddie exhales, nostrils flared, and then crosses the room to sit next to Richie on the bed.

"Okay, well, Mr. Tozier, why don't you tell me what happened from your perspective?" She says, leaning back against the desk.

"Well, I finished my show, did the whole meet and greet, signed autographs, went to meet Eddie for dinner and we got jumped in the alley."

"Can you elaborate at all?" Detective Johnson says from the corner.

"Why?"

"Why did they attack you?" Johnson asks plainly from the couch. He looked practically fucking bored.

"I don't know, they didn't exactly monologue for us before it happened." Richie says snidely. "Next time I'll request the bad guy

soliloquy.”

“They didn’t say anything to you?” The woman prompts.

“No.” Richie snaps. He doesn’t realize his leg is bouncing up and down until Eddie stills him with a hand over his kneecap. Eddie quickly removes it.

“Guys, we want to help you.” Johnson sighs.

“Richie cut down the alley to avoid fans, we met there, talked for a minute and as we were talking they came up behind Richie and hit him over the back of the head, I think the rest is pretty self explanatory.” Eddie looks up at her.

“Look, you guys gotta be honest with us.” Johnson crosses his arms over his chest.

“Well fucking excuse me, if you know so much why don’t you just tell us what happened?” Eddie snaps at him.

“Okay.” Johnson stands up, hands on his hips. “I think you two met up in the alley, you were making out, and those little pricks saw it and didn’t like it, so they assaulted you.”

Eddie’s breathing stutters and Richie freezes. Eddie’s still glaring at Johnson, whereas Richie’s gaze has dropped to his now-shaking hands in his lap. “*Dave*” Juliano hisses to her partner.

“That’s funny man, really.” Richie says quietly, breathing an empty laugh.

“We have the video, Mr. Tozier.” Juliano says plainly.

Eddie leans forward, putting his head in his hands, avoiding his stitches, but unable to completely avoid the swelling. Richie does not respond.

“Mr--”

“Okay, so fucking what?!” Eddie snaps up at the detectives, “nothing is gonna happen to those kids anyway, you’re not gonna find them,

so what does it fucking matter? Can you just fucking leave this alone?!”

“Ed.” Richie whispers.

“We didn’t do anything wrong.” Eddie hisses.

“No, you didn’t.” Juliano agrees with them, “but if this was a hate crime, they need to be charged appropriately.”

“It’s not like you’re going to find them.”

“Actually, we think we might be able to.” Johnson says from the corner. Richie looks up at that, glancing at Eddie’s stricken face out of the corner of his eye. “Restaurant has security cameras set up in the alley, they got a clear shot of the assailant. We release the video to the media and someone will come forward with their names.”

“You can’t release the video,” Richie looks up at him, “I...look clearly we’re not...well, I’m not... out . You can’t release the video.” Silence settles between the four of them, and Eddie turns towards Richie a bit,, leaning into his space. He runs a hand up and down Richie’s back, scratching his fingers along the nape of his neck.

“We can edit it.” Juliano says, stepping forward. “We want to catch these guys, and we have a chance. But we need a full statement from you guys about what happened, you can’t leave this stuff out.”

“What the fuck do you want me to say?” Richie asks, “that they knocked me upside the head and beat our asses, then held Eddie down and tried to fucking kill me? That they called us fags and and only left us there because an employee came out of the staff door? I’ve been hearing this shit from pricks like that since I could run my big mouth, assholes like that are nothing new.”

“Rich,” Eddie says, but Riche stands up, dislodging Eddie’s arms.

“No!” Riche says, beginning to pace, “Those assholes are nothing more than Bowers was, and fuck that guy he’s dead now. I don’t owe anything to them, the last fucking thing I need to do is waste more time on people like that. I have a fucking show in Colorado tonight, and I don’t care if you’re coming with me or not Ed, my flight leaves

in two hours.”

“Give us a formal statement and we can do the rest of this remotely.” Johnson says from the corner and Richie spins in place so fast the world spins a bit. He stares intently at Johnson long enough that Eddie gets uncomfortable with the energy between the two of them.

“If you release any of that video, you edit out what happened before the attack and you blur Eddie’s face. And I swear to god if you guys go public with this.... gay thing, I’m suing the shit out of you.”

“Deal”

“Let me call my agent.”

They’re sitting on the airplane in first class, they’re the only ones in their row (*“it’s so nobody will see us Richie, plus it’s more hygienic.” “How is it more hygienic?” “...just buy them.” “You’re lucky there’s no coach left.”*) They’re just waiting for the flight to go down the runway and the attendants are doing their safety briefing when Richie takes his hood down.

“Rich,” Eddie chides, his own hood up concealing his face.

“M not wearing that for the whole flight Eds, besides, nobody’s looking anyway.” Eddie glances around. Next to them across the aisle is a strung-out business man and a child no older than ten, both of them with their faces buried in their phones. Nobody else in their area is paying attention. Eddie takes his own hood down, but keeps the baseball cap on.

Eddie sighs and relaxes back against the seat. Richie put Eddie in the window seat so that if someone did recognize Richie, Eddie could be more hidden. They’ve never had to be this paranoid going places before. Eddie looks over at Richie, who is staring down at his phone with a furrowed brow.

“Richie, get off of Twitter.” Eddie chides softly.

“Nah, Eds, gotta find out what my loyal fans think about my new look.” Richie quips, smirking as he looks down at his phone. Eddie leans over so he can read along with Richie.

“ *I still want him to raw me.* ” Eddie reads out loud, causing Richie to chuckle, “same.” He says quieter near Richie’s ear.

Richie turns his head to look at Eddie “Oh yea? Bad boys do it for you, babe?”

“Oh yea, you know, exposure to blood-borne pathogens, risk of infection, and sepsis. It all really turns me on.” Eddie deadpans back and they both chuckle.

“Shut up, you’re not gonna let either of us get infected. Everyone loves your Rapunzel hoodie, by the way.” Richie angles his phone over to Eddie can see the paparazzi photos.

“Not my fault, it’s what Dee had in her suitcase.” Eddie rolls his eyes, “And you never know. Airplanes are a cesspool of germs and bacteria and everyone is breathing the same recycled air for several hours at a time.” Eddie continues on his rant. Eddie hates flying, really hates it. Richie’s surprised he even managed to get Eddie on the flight with him.

Granted, he did have to sit through ten minutes of Eddie disinfecting their seats, much to the bemusement (or annoyance) of the attendants and fellow passengers who witnessed the entire interaction. Eddie took an antibacterial wipe to the seats, their trays, their armrests, the overhead buttons and air vents (*“...the air vent is one of the dirtiest places on a plane, Richie. Do you know how many people touch this? And how often it isn’t cleaned?”*) and made Richie rub germ-ex into all unharmed exposed skin, even rolling up his shirt to his elbows to get his forearms. Eddie normally wasn’t this bad, but Richie’s known Eddie long enough to understand how his panic manifests.

Richie leans over and presses a chaste kiss to the side of Eddie’s head. Eddie stops talking, blushes, and then looks around to make sure

nobody's watching. When his paranoia is satisfied he looks back to Richie with furrowed brows.

"You know I'm still not happy about this."

"I know."

"And being sweet isn't going to make me any less upset about this."

"I know." Richie says, grabbing Eddie's hand and entwining their fingers between them. "Thank you."

Eddie grumbles, cheeks still red, but adjusts their grip and settles back into Richie's side to read more of his twitter feed.

"Oh, you need to post that you're not cancelling the show." Eddie reminds him, and Richie manages to type the tweet out entirely with his left hand only. As soon as he posts the tweet, it immediately begins to get likes and replies. Richie locks his phone and puts it away. He closes his eyes and relaxes back against his new-ly disinfected headrest.

His head hurts like hell, he feels stuffy and nauseous. His face fucking hurt, every time he smiled it pulled a little bit at his stitches and his split lip, and even just sitting there in the airplane seat made his ribs hurt. But he was fine, he was going to be fine. He wasn't going to let that asshole affect his life any more than necessary. Besides, he gets to take more pain meds as soon as they land.

They had an explosive fight over the Denver show in the hotel with the detectives sitting by awkwardly as they waited for Steve to call back. When Richie wouldn't budge on doing the Denver show, they came to a tense settlement that Eddie would go with him, Richie would do the show then they would immediately fly back home. Steve called in a couple favors and had a lawyer meet Richie and Eddie at the station to provide their statements before leaving town. Maybe it was the lengthy recount of last night's assault, but by the time they left the station, they were both too tired to fight anymore.

Richie didn't exactly remember everything. He remembers kissing Eddie against the alley wall, thinking how sexy it was that Eddie was

so into it despite the unsanitary environment. Then he got hit in the back of the head with something, knocking skulls with Eddie, shoving Eddie's head into the brick wall.

They pulled Richie off of Eddie by the back of his collar.

There were three of them, older men, just a little older than Richie and Eddie were. Nondescript save for the ringleader, a buff guy with a t-shirt and navy tattoos along his arms.

"What the fuck are you fags doing here?" He said, pushing Richie.

"Dude, seriously?" Richie asked back, adjusting his shirt. He tried to walk past him to get to Eddie, but he grabbed Richie's bicep in a vice grip. He was shorter than Richie by a few inches, but he was certainly stronger. Richie idly imagined he would have finger-shaped bruises on his arm (and he did.)

"Where you goin, fairy boy." The man pulled Richie back.

"Let go of me." Richie said, staring down at him. In the pit of his stomach a fear began to grow, one that he's only ever felt a few times in his life. *I know your secret* .

"What? Fairy doesn't wanna dance." The guy turned to his two buddies, who were flanked on either side of Eddie.

"Who the fuck calls people fairy anymore? It's 2017 dickwad, grow up." Eddie spit, feeling the back of his head to check for bleeding. The guys next to him laughed until one of them pulled Eddie up by the back of his shirt to punch him in the stomach.

"Ed!" Richie shouted, jerking forward to get to him, only to be yanked back.

"Your little girlfriend's got a mouth on him." He said, pushing Richie's far shoulder.

"What the fuck is wrong with you guys." Richie shoved back, finally knocking the guy's grip off of his shirt. "Just fucking get out of here, fucking asshole." He tried to walk back to Eddie but he was shoved harshly from behind, stumbling forward.

Richie looked over to see Eddie land a punch on one of the guys, before getting yanked back by his hair. Richie stepped forward to help him, but he was pushed again. This time he spun around fast, shoving the guy's shoulders harshly.

The man stumbled back, but froze for a moment, looking oddly at Richie.

"Aren't you that comedian guy?" He asked, squinting at Richie. "Wally, isn't this that comedian guy your girlfriend was gonna go see tonight?"

Richie glanced over at Eddie, only to see the two men holding him against the wall, one arm across his neck. Richie averted his gaze, not wanting to see them, he could feel their eyes on the back of his neck anyway. Goosebumps trailed down his spine and his stomach began to twist with fear. Richie closed his eyes.

"Fuck, man, you're right Terry." Wally, the guy with Eddie, sounded a little stricken at that, but *Terry* just started laughing.

"Ooh, Trashmouth right, that's what you call yourself?" Terry looked a little manic, an expression Richie suddenly remembered being the default expression on Bowers' face. "I've seen your shit on Netflix dude, who would have thought Trashmouth's a fuckin' flamer."

"Go fuck yourself." Richie bit back, "at least I'm not some bald, middle-aged sack of shit getting my rocks off by punching strangers."

Richie hadn't been punched in a long time, he almost forgot what the sharp sting of it felt like. Everything after that was a little fuzzy. Richie got a couple good hits in while they tousled, one that hurt like a bitch on his knuckles, but eventually Terry got him to the ground and started wailing on him. He brought his arms up to defend himself, but at some point he seemed to just white-out from all of the blows to his face, or maybe his head was bashed against the ground too many times, but he didn't remember much more than that. There's a faint memory of being moved, of Eddie's voice, being concerned because he knew Eddie was crying but nothing concrete until he woke up in the hospital.

“Rich?” He’s woken up by Eddie shaking his shoulder. He looks frantically over at Eddie, and notices his own breathing is hard and labored, his hands trembling. A wave of nausea sweeps over him and he covers his mouth. Eddie is shoving a puke bag into his hand, but Richie unhooks his seatbelt and shoots up and out of his seat to stagger down to the bathroom.

He’s pretty sure he blacks out a bit sometime during his dry heaving. He doesn’t have anything in his stomach except bile, but even that made its way up his throat. His ribs were practically screaming through the entire event. He’s not sure if it was the dry heaving or his busted ribs that made him cry, but he washed his mouth out with water and leaned against the counter to let the tears finish before going back to his seat.

After a hushed apology to the stewardess, Richie sits back down next to Eddie and is handed a bottle of water, one of his pain pills, and gum. Richie glances at him, noticing the things Eddie doesn’t think he sees: Eddie’s pinched brow, picking at his cuticles and the deathgrip on his inhaler. Eddie has really been working on his hypochondria and his germaphobia, Richie hasn’t seen the inhaler in a few months, but Eddie always reverts back to this when he’s stressed or panicked. Richie wants to make it better, but he knows it’s not something he can necessarily help with. Richie uses some purell from Eddie’s bag, and then entangles their fingers together again to keep Eddie from picking at his skin. He deliberately doesn’t bring attention to the sweet smile that grows across Eddie’s face out of the corner of his eye.

Steve >:(

Sold Out tonight!!

Get your tickets now to see the sad clown

Pretty much. Don't say anything stupid.

Love you too

gfy

:)

If they weren't on a time crunch, Richie would have loved to take Eddie around Denver International and show him all of the fucked up murals. Instead, he pulled Eddie's hood up over his baseball cap, squeezed his hand and then put his head down to drag them through the airport to baggage claim.

Eddie keeps up pretty well. He bought them both those fancy omnidirectional suitcases for Christmas last year, so there wasn't much lugging around to be had, except for Eddie's duffle bag full of questionable medicine and "emergency supplies."

There aren't paparazzi at the airport, and Richie isn't looking around to see if they are spotted by anyone with a phone, but he still keeps his distance. They're used to this, to being discreet in public. Affection is hard for them in private places, let alone public ones, and usually they aren't so fucking careless like they were when....

At the venue, there are definitely photographers and fans waiting outside for him. Probably not fans, he thinks idly, probably just people there looking for a peek at the sad clown show. The venue staff comes out to help them out of the car and Richie watches one of Dee's assistants grab their bags from the back. He gets out first, then pulls Eddie between him and the car door as the cameras began flashing and a world of noise explodes around them. It seems to be normal people, teenage girls with phones and college kids, but there are a couple professional grade cameras going off in Richie's face.

"Take him inside." Richie leans into the security guy's ear, feeling like he's screaming to be heard over the noise in his ears. The security guy nods and wraps an arm around Eddie to escort him inside. Eddie casts a worried glance over his shoulder, but follows along. The assistant grabs their carry-on's from the trunk and Richie grabs Eddie's duffle from the floor of the backseat to follow them

inside.

“You didn’t have to send me ahead,” Eddie’s waiting in the dressing room for Richie once he gets inside, leaning against the vanity. He’s taken off the hat and is rubbing hand sanitizer into his skin.

“Come with me. Gotta do a lights and sound check before they open house.”

They don’t walk hand-in-hand down the hall, instead Richie guides Eddie with a hand on the small of his back to the stage. The lighting guys run through their check as they wait for sound, a kaleidoscope of color morphing across the stage as they test each bulb. Richie takes a moment to observe Eddie, cast in pink and blue lights. His breath catches in his throat.

Eddie, with his chin up, looks beautiful in the light, but somber. He always does, with his stupid resting-stressed-face (as Richie calls it) but here he seems so...adult. The harsh, gaunt lines of his face, bags under his eyes, the sharp cut of his jaw. It’s always jarring to see the finite proof of their age. It fills him with a deep longing for what they lost, the time they didn’t get to have.

It’s the wounds on Eddie’s face that really give him a double-take. From this angle, he can see the two lines of stitches (one along the hairline, one between his brows) and the irritated red of the road rash along the right side of his profile. The red skin looks almost black under blue light and for a moment he’s back *there* .

He’s in the Cistern, holding Eddie’s dead body in his blood-stained hands, being dragged away kicking and screaming. He’s thirteen and watching black ooze out of not-Eddie’s mouth. He’s in the Cistern and Pennywise is slitting Eddie’s throat over him slowly, dramatically, letting the blood spill down across his body, drenching him, getting in his eyes and mouth.

It’s gone again in an instant, leaving behind only tremors in his hands, a pulsing in his head and a heartbeat he can’t catch up with. None of it was real. It’s never real. He’s seen so many things from the deadlights; he finds new visions in nightmares, and relives old ones during moments like these. He was only stuck in it for a few minutes,

but it was pure and concentrated and felt like an eternity passing between each passing moment.

But the wounds on Eddie's face? It's not from some evil fucking deity. This was caused by some fuckheads in Missouri, real people, no trace of Pennywise in their bodies. But then again, Richie's seen traces of Pennywise in people long before he remembered *It's* name. Reality is so much worse. The bad, horrible things real people will do to one another is somehow worse than the idea of *It* . At least the adults in Derry were infected with Pennywise, like a sick miasma that coated that town and its inhabitants. Richie felt pity for them sometimes.

These men, though? He hated them. It sweeps over him in a wave so strong he can't stand still. He doesn't hate them for his own broken body, but for the others'. For everyone they've ever made feel small, everyone they've ever pushed around; He hates them for what they did to Eddie. He's viscerally reminded just how fucking desperately he loves Eddie. He loves him so much it's terrifies him. But god dammit, he just wants to let himself be happy, to have this with Eddie without caring what anyone else thinks.

So why does he still hate himself for it sometimes?

That's the thing; fag, fairy, flamer those don't hurt because in the back of his mind he knows they're true. He's been calling himself those names his whole life. Nobody can get the drop on you or use a weakness against you if you beat them to the punchline. No homophobic slur is going to break him because nobody hates Richie Tozier more than Richie fucking Tozier.

He's gonna have a fun therapy session when he gets back home.

Eddie must feel his gaze, because he turns, furrowing his brow at Richie. "What's up, Rich?"

"Nothing." he mutters, trying to smile Eddie's concern away, as if that **ever** works.

Richie gets into his clothes, a royal blue blazer over black jeans and a t-shirt (what he usually wears for his set). He takes a few minutes to gel his hair into place, and then Eddie is in his face with a bottle of

saline and a handful of q-tips from his toiletry bag. He swabs around Richie's injuries carefully, slapping his chest when Richie pretends to flinch. Dee comes in a few minutes later with an ice pack and her own personal bag of makeup.

"You're lucky I'm pale," she says, making Richie hold the ice to one side of his face as she tried to cover up some of the damage. Her attempt to cover up the black eye fucking stung and Richie really did jump a couple times, but she was as gentle as she could be. "Do not put anything near his stitches," Eddie pipes up from where he stands behind Dee. Richie can see her roll her eyes when Eddie was looking away.

"There. Nothing we can do for the nose brace, and I did the best I could for your black eye. You still look a little like roadkill but...handsome roadkill?" She pulls back to assess the damage.

He's not necessarily excited about the show. The spotlight during sound check had made his stomach swim with nausea, and his body fucking aches, his head pulses in time with his heart, but those fuckers aren't gonna stop him from doing his set.

"What do you need?" Eddie asks when they're alone.

"Well..." Richie tries to joke, but he's too little tired for the followthrough.

"Symptoms?" Eddie asks, pulling his medicine bag out of his duffle.

"Uh...nausea? Also my head is killing me."

Eddie digs around in his bag for a moment.

"Zofran for your nausea, you're not supposed to have anymore of the prescription yet, but one won't hurt, and here's some Ibuprofen for inflammation, should help with your head too, but that's probably just the concussion you need to sleep off, which is why I told you not to do this fucking show." Eddie hands Richie a tiny pile of pills and water, muttering the whole time.

"Ed-" Richie began, but Eddie waved him off.

They're not gonna have that discussion right now, apparently.

Notes for the Chapter:

TW: Internalized Homophobia, Homophobic languages/slurs, Depictions of Violence, emetophobia, Hate Crime, Richie and Eddie low-key get outed?

"The fun has just begun, right?"

4. My weakness I feel I must finally show

**Watch now! Trashmouth's cryptic speech: Black Lives Matter,
Gay Rights, and more!**

Buzzfeed News

Trashmouth Tozier disses Trump in bizarre speech

Vice

**The night after his assault, Trashmouth Tozier calls out bigotry
in Denver**

NPR



TrashStan @trashstan: RICHIE TOZIER SAID GAY FUCKING RIGHTS THIS IS NOT A DRILL

TrashStan @trashstan: *replying to @trashstan* Richie called me babe, and i'm pretty sure I blacked out.

TrashStan @trashstan: *replying to @trashstan* Holy shit this blew up. Don't have a soundcloud, but follow my Insta, I model and do cross stitch.

Y'once @Scrrr_Trev: And that's a mic drop on a good ally speech.
#Trashmouth

Lesbian || **Rights** @BlondieGod: Never been a big fan of Tozier's stuff, but what he said is honestly so important. #Trashmouth

RIP Daniel @Monivoca: The speech was great, but was kinda out of the blue, y'know? *#Trashmouth*

Snorlax Stan @KooLax: when your problematic fave becomes an unproblematic fav??? *#Trashmouth*

Alanna // @Edge_bot : So Tozier finally realized half his audience are trump-voting dudebros and told them to get fucked. Good for her. *#Trashmouth*

When Richie goes onstage, it's to a Standing O from the crowd. For a moment he's struck. It's not like it's never happened to him before, but this wasn't about his set, his charity show, or whatever the fuck else he was doing. This was for him. Just for him. He takes a moment to look out over the crowd, ignoring the pulsing pain in his head from the spotlights. It's his usual crowd. Edgelord college kids, older men, and an odd selection of younger women. He wonders, idly, how many of these people would be fucking cheering for him if they knew what he does in the dark. Would they be on his side, or on *their* side?

"You know, before we get started, let's mention the elephant in the room...my dick. Okay, yea, not funny, I know. But what can you do? This would not be a patented Trashmouth Tozier show if it didn't both start and end with a dick joke. You're welcome." The crowd laughs, and cheers, hotter than they should be for him. "But really yea, I guess now's a good a time as any to talk about this, then we'll get back to your regularly scheduled programming."

"I guess I'll start off by disappointing you. I was not in the alley to solicit a prostitute or buy drugs. Although it's adorable that people think I would by drugs in fucking Kansas City. I live in LA, please, the coke I (allegedly) buy is more expensive than your mortgage. That shit's Designer. Name Brand. Ain't no great value coke for me, no sir.

Nah, I was just cutting down the alley, like a dumbass, to meet a friend for dinner. This isn't the first time in my life I've gotten the shit beat out of me, my tween years pretty much went: wake up, run from bullies, excel in school, annoy my friends, get the shit beat out of me, homework, pine. But it has been a long ass time, and damn getting punched in the face is an *experience*. I'm fine, though I do have a pretty bad concussion, so If I run off stage to vomit, don't roast me on Twitter like you all did last time. Extenuating circumstances, you know? No but seriously, We're okay, mostly just cuts and bruises, a cracked rib or two, nothing I can't nurse back to health with some whiskey and weed."

"My friend...you know, I don't know how many times I'll have to say this, but honestly just fuckin' leave him alone? I'll throw a 'please' in there if it'll make a difference. He's just a normal dude, boring office job, he doesn't really need any of this. You see, it'll get him all stressed out and he's already got therapy notes longer than a CVS receipt." Richie makes an exaggerated grimace, walking forward and glancing out at the anticipating faces of his audience. His gaze catches on an older man in a button down, sitting with his pretty little wife, arm around her shoulders, pinched expression. Another stern-faced, balding biker in the back, a college kid with a backwards red snapback and his legs spread wide, foot kicked up on the chair in front of him to the annoyance of the girl sitting there.

That overprotective hate he felt on Eddie's behalf earlier rockets up again, and his fingers shake with the effort to stamp it down. He keeps looking at people in his audience and he can hear slurs from their mouths, hear them laugh a little *too hard* at jokes on the borderline of appropriate and not. He can see that sharp glint in their eyes, the same one from *Terry* in the alley. He can't fucking tell if he's more mad or upset but his fingers are trembling and the energy is too much for him to contain.

He really fucking hates them all of a sudden. Those men in the alley, the snide looking little Tomi Lahren sitting three rows back, Brock Turner cheering from stage left with his frat buddies. Is this really his fucking audience? Anyone that would think like *them*, that would act like *them*, that wouldn't bat an eye at a fucking hate crime, do they really deserve any part of him?

"I'll be the first to admit, nobody in the world is going to put "PC" and Richie Tozier in the same sentence unless you're talking about the one time I got a disk drive stuck on my dick. (It was the 90's and the paramedics tried very hard not to laugh, bless their hearts.) I've said some fucked up shit, said things ten years ago that makes me want to cancel myself, I get it, shit's embarrassing to look back on. Pretty low-brow honestly. But the thing is...I'm..hmm." Richie walks forward towards the edge of the stage, sitting on top of the steps there. There's a nice-looking college girl in the front row with her phone out, rainbow sticker on the back, recording him.

"Oh good, you're recording this? Great. Tag me on twitter." He clears his throat, "Those pricks said some nasty shit to us before, during and after they bashed my head into the pavement, so let me just be perfectly fucking clear. If you hate people because of the color of their skin, their race, religion, sexuality, gender identity, any of that new-age shit we didn't get to talk about in the 80's: you're a piece of shit and you can get fucked. If you think any of that shit is okay, please just get up and fucking leave. Neo-nazi's, homophobes, and racists are not welcome in this house.

"Do not watch my shit, do not come to my shows, don't tune in on Netflix, don't download my old shit and act like I'm one of you. I'm not. If anything I've said in the past makes you think that *any* of that behavior is okay, then I'm sorry and I take it back. Never use my words, my comedy, to pat yourself on the back for being an asshole. Black Lives Matter, Gay Rights, Fuck Trump, Protect Trans Kids, etc. if any of that bothers you, you can get fucked on the way out. Thanks."

"You get all that, babe?" He asks the girl recording, who is looking up at him, mouth gaping. She nods quickly, and he winks at her with his good eye, and then gets up. The entire crowd seems confused, but a pretty vocal minority is cheering very loudly. Richie, with his back turned to them, takes a steadying breath.

"Okay. Anyway, back to your regularly scheduled Trashmouth set. Let's discuss the first time I got crossfaded in college, and a sexy little friend I met named Nurse Vanessa..."

Richie kisses Eddie as soon as he gets off stage and then promptly dry heaves in his dressing room for another ten minutes. Dee's there at some point, with a very helpful "Steve's gonna kill you, but in my opinion, gold star." But Richie could honestly care less. Eddie shuts the lights off in the dressing room but even dimmed they shoot straight through his eyes to his brain and he wants to cry. He's not sure how he got through the whole set under the stage lights and with so many people there, but he's really fucking feeling it now.

Eddie's sitting next to Richie's kneeling form, rubbing his back and talking quietly to Dee for him. Richie collapses against Eddie's side, closing his eyes, holding Eddie's sweater in a death grip so he doesn't actually pass out.

When her sympathy runs out, Dee shoves some gum in his mouth, touches up the makeup, and then sends him out the stage door to sign programs for the stragglers. Eddie packs up their bags and takes them out to wait in the car for Richie. There were a lot more fans than Richie's used to, the moment he walks outside, the noise and lights hit him with sweeping nausea once again. He holds his hands up to quiet the small crowd that had formed.

"I wasn't kidding about the concussion so unless you want me to puke on you, if we could just like... *shhh* that'd be...yea that's great. Let's play the quiet game. Thanks."

"Yes I'm okay, thank you for coming."

"No It wasn't a joke, I meant all of it. Cheeto man can suck my dick."

"You only want this selfie because now I'm the ugly friend and you're going to look ten times nicer than you already do."

"Thanks for the support, no, we really appreciate it."

"I'd rather be a dirty SJW than a fuckin Nazi, bro. Get out of here."

Eddie's hands shake around the pill bottles. He grabs his medicine bag, and turns it upside-down, emptying it out into the sink. Dramamine, NyQuill, Ibuprofen, Aleve, Tylenol, Acetaminophen, Robitussin, Motrin, Claritin, Sudafed, Advil. He needs ambien, why the fuck didn't he bring the ambien? Does he even have Ambien at the house or did he flush it? He picks up all of the bottles, reading the label, looking for the highest dosage of diphenhydramine. The strongest thing he fucking has is Melatonin.

He yells in frustration, grabs the Tylenol bottle and throws it across the room with a resounding bang when it hits the showers glass.

He needs to go to the drug store, he needs to--

"Eddie?" Richie asks, rounding the doorframe and looking at him. Eddie's sure he looks like a fucking maniac, half undressed, medicine bottles scattered over the sink and onto the floor. His breathing is hard, and all he can fucking look at is the crack in Richie's glasses and how wrinkled his shirt is and--

"Ed." Richie grabs his hands, Eddie hadn't realized he was digging his fingernails into the soft flesh of his palms. Richie forces his grip open, runs the pads of his thumbs across the red crescent marks there. His hands are shaking in Richie's grip.

He tries to look at their hands, to calm down, but Richie's got dirt under his fingers and scraped knuckles and his fingernails are uneven and he can't remember the last time Richie washed his hands and--

"We need to go to the store." Eddie tries to pull his hands away from Richie's grip, but Richie's fingers just tighten around him. Eddie yanks back. "Rich, let me go. Fucking let go--"

"Eddie, stop." Richie tries, but Eddie jerks himself back, staggering into the towel rack behind him. It hurts. But for that moment, when the pain registers, he can breathe just a little easier. Eddie closes his eyes. He wants to sink down to the floor but the floor is probably dirty, and the housekeeping probably hasn't bleached the floor in god knows how long and--

“Just breathe, Eds.” Richie says, thankfully not touching Eddie. Eddie keeps his eyes closed, tries to regulate his breathing but fuck. His eyes burn, and he grinds his palms into his eye sockets.

“Ed, stop.” Eddie flinches back cause he can hear Richie step towards him. “Okay, here.” Eddie opens his eyes and Richie’s shoving the pill bottles out of the sink, lining them up neatly on the counter. He grabs Eddie’s travel-sized antibacterial soap and turns the tap on. “Count for me, Ed, how long do I need to do this for?”

As if on auto-pilot, Eddie counts under his breath. Richie does it perfect, under his nails and between his fingers and up his forearms. Eddie stops him after thirty seconds. After Richie dries off his hands he grabs Eddie by the elbows. He counts to thirty while Eddie washes his own hands. He feels disconnected from his limbs, but watches Richie turn the tap off and rub a white towel over his hands, drying them off. His breathing is a little less labored after that.

“Can I hold you now?” Richie asks quietly, waiting for Eddie’s nod before he steps forward to wrap his arms around Eddie’s shoulders. Eddie shoves his face into Richie’s neck.

“You’re sweaty” he mumbled into the clammy skin there.

“Do you want to shower?”

Eddie nods.

This isn’t new for them. This isn’t the first time Eddie’s *regressed* (which is just a worse word for *fucked up* that his therapist likes to use) and it won’t be the last time. Richie “regresses” by picking up a bottle and shutting himself off alone. He also gets very self deprecating (more so than usual) and doesn’t shower until Eddie makes him. Eddie’s regressions are worse, more dramatic. They deal.

Richie strips them, removes their watches and his bracelets, and he kneels down to properly untie Eddie’s shoes and pull his socks off. If Eddie was alone he’d scrub his skin raw, but Richie’s there, and he works his extra energy into cleaning Richie’s hair (he has to lean down) and then scrubbing them both pink from head-to-toe.

They brush their teeth afterwards until Richie's phone timer (set to two minutes) goes off, and then they take their *prescribed* medicine (painkillers for both of them and an Ativan for Eddie.) They get changed and Eddie stands off to the side as Richie strips the hotel sheets and puts the travel sheets Eddie brought onto the bed. He hasn't used the travel sheets in months, but is thankful he kept them in the zipper of his suitcase anyway. Eddie's eyes burn again, but he changes into clean clothes (still folded perfectly in his suitcase) and then lets Richie pull him down onto the bed.

They lie there for a while, Eddie leaning on Richie's chest, head on his shoulder until their hair dries and Eddie's face feels swollen and he's exhausted. His hands have stopped shaking, and he is tracing the lines of Richie's palms, examining his uneven nails.

"Hey," Richie says, pressing a kiss to Eddie's forehead, "I'm starving, I can't remember the last time we fucking ate." Eddie mumbles something affirmative. "Why don't we find some clean eating Vegan place and order deliver, and while we wait I'll let you clip my nails like I know you want to, and you can even comb my hair."

Eddie leans up to look at Richie. He's feeling rather numb at the moment but his chest does tighten with absolute fondness for Richie. Richie, who must be in so much pain with his concussion and injuries, just dropped everything to take care of him.

Eddie hates to say it like that. Myra and his mother wanted to "take care" of Eddie. They needed to protect Eddie from the world, to shelter him and distance him from any possible danger. Richie just wants to *help* Eddie. He doesn't treat him like he's breakable, he doesn't assume what Eddie needs. But he knows what Eddie *wants* when he's like this and he steps up and is eager to help with that. Richie doesn't try to control him, just steer him in the right direction and God, he loves Richie for it.

Richie doesn't want to eat Vegan, doesn't like eating gluten and dairy free. Doesn't like clipping his nails, doesn't like timing it when he brushes his teeth. But Eddie has to fall back on all of his *shitybadnogood* behaviors including all of his stupid fucking hysterical allergies and germaphobic tendencies when he's *manic* (another word his therapist taught him.) But Richie doesn't make fun of him for it,

not in the moment, he just...he does it because Eddie wants him to? And Eddie doesn't usually have to ask and...

"I love you." Eddie says, voice only big enough for the space between them. This space is the only place where it's comfortable for them to be like this. They're alone, they're the only two people in the world in this space. Myra never existed here, his mother is dead here. Richie doesn't feel the need to deflect here, Eddie doesn't get angry here. This is *their space* their space where they're not gay or *fags* or closeted or bi, they're not Trashmouth or Edward Kaspbrak. They're just Eddie and Richie and that's always been all they needed.

"I love you too." Eddie kisses him.

Notes for the Chapter:

TW: Panic attack, talk of bigotry, political talk

Okay. Yes, I know this is the third chapter that has ended with them saying "I love you" but it's the only emotional vulnerability they're comfortable with lmao. I hope the words at least feel appropriately weighted, cause there's just so much they don't know how to say.

Eddie is **Not Okay**(TM)

Also It's a little short but the next one is twice the length, and i'm gonna try and get it out tomorrow night if I can edit it in time. This illustration is much better than the last few have been lol

5. Lend me your hand and we'll conquer them all



TMZ @TMZ @kcpolice have released video of the attack on @Trashmouth to help ID the attackers. #RT

Martinique @mijojo @kcpolice Holy shit. If any of my followers live in Kansas City and know who these men are please call the PD. This is so hard to watch

I can't odd @kenkafor @kcpolice this is fucking disgusting

Richie Tozier @Trashmouth Hey @TSA, you gotta wine and dine a lady before fondling them up in the middle of the airport. I may be a cheap whore, but consent is cool.

#FloridaWoman @helloworld replying to @Trashmouth WE LOVE YOU!! Get better soon! <3 <3

Ted Grant @werewolfweekend replying to @Trashmouth Class act, Tozier lmao

“Baby, daddy’s home!” Riche shouts when they walk through the door. They set their suitcases down inside the door, and listen for the frantic scraping of claws on the floor. The dog came bounding around the corner, gaining up the momentum to jump up on Richie’s chest. He stumbled back, but reached out to rub her head.

“Were you a good girl while daddy was gone, Hol’?” Richie scratched under her chin and smushed a kiss to her head before grabbing her paws and putting her down. She went to Eddie next, sitting down primly in front of him, panting and looking up, waiting for her greeting. Eddie bent down to scratch under her chin, and he didn’t complain when she licked his face.

Richie grabs her walking leash and fastens the collar around her neck and Eddie steps up to the table they keep in the foyer. As Richie slips out the door, Eddie goes through the motions of putting his things away when he sees the note from their dog sitter, one of the neighbor girls.

“Holly was perfect all weekend! I saw the video, I’m sorry, hope you guys feel better!” She signed it off with hearts

Eddie has to think about it for a moment before he processes what she means. They released *the video* . Oh fuck. He debates it for only half a second before his curiosity gets the better of him and he pulls his phone out.

They blurred Eddie’s face out like they promised, but it’s like an out

of body experience to watch the whole thing in HD from a different angle. There's no audio, and the video starts right when they yank Richie away and stops when the men leave. Did all of that really happen in under five minutes? The last frame is him crouched over Richie's body, blubbering on the phone to the 911 operator while a waitress kneels down next to him. He feels the panic bubble to the surface again. He puts his phone away and goes back over to his travel bag, digging his Ativan prescription out.

"The video is fucking horrible." Eddie says from where he's cutting celery on the kitchen counter. Richie has just come back from taking Holly out, and is confused for a moment before realization dawns on him. Eddie cuts a few tiny pieces, adds a dollop of peanut butter, and sets them aside as treats for Holly. Richie grabs one of the full sized celery snacks and grumbles at the pisswater taste, but pops it in his mouth.

"Yea, the police showed it to me at the station." Richie grabs one of the treats, making Holly 'sit' before he feeds it to her. "Good girl!" Richie rubs her head again. For a brief, irrational second, Eddie's so fucking pissed that Richie's just taking this in stride that he speaks before he can stop himself.

"Can you like, react to this like a normal fucking person, please?" Eddie says harshly. He immediately sets the knife down and puts his face in his hands. "I'm sorry, that's not fair."

"Yea, it's not." Richie grabs the glass of water from in front of Eddie and empties it out into the sink. Eddie hears him open a cabinet and then there's a plastic princess cup in front of him instead, full to the brim with water.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" He rolls his eyes, but Richie holds his hands up.

"In my defense, those glasses are from my Nana, and Mags will kill both of us if you break one."

"I'm not gonna break the glass." Eddie mutters, but Richie just tilts his head to the side, glaring at Eddie.

“C’mon babe, I’d rather you break a plate or something than hold it in. It’s fine if you break shit, just not like, important shit. And y’know, clean up the glass cause I don’t wear shoes in this house.” Richie puts a hand on Eddie’s bicep and Eddie lays his fingers over Richie’s, breathing a laugh into the space between them.

“I am stressed about this too.” Richie finally says clumsily shoving his ass up to sit on top of the kitchen counter. Holly comes up and stands with her paws on Richie’s thighs, panting for another treat. Richie rubs her head lazily. “I just...I don’t know Eds. Those guys don’t matter. We’re okay. We’re here. The bruises will heal.”

“Doesn’t it piss you off?” Eddie rubs Holly’s neck too.

“Yea but...I don’t know. I’m mad that they hurt you, but me? That shit happened to me all the time as a kid. That’s one thing I never forgot. Bowers called me a fag more times than I can count, and beat the shit out of me just as much.”

“Hey,” Eddie says, trying to get Richie’s attention, but Richie stares hard down at Holly’s golden coat. Eddie reaches up, gripping Richie’s jaw and forcing his gaze on him. He doesn’t like it when Richie looks like this, absent behind the eyes, defeated.

“You don’t deserve it either, Rich. You know that, right?” Richie’s tries to avoid Eddie’s gaze.

“I don’t know, man. They’re not wrong.”

“They are wrong.” Eddie tries.

“Nah man, I mean. Like the whole gay thing...I don’t know. It sounds a lot more rational in my head. It’s not like it’s some lie, I do like dick, that’s not a lie.”

“Even if you are gay, Rich, or bi, or whatever, it doesn’t mean you deserved any of that. Just because the words they were saying were true doesn’t mean you deserve to be hurt for them. I know, behind all of this,” he pokes Richie in the forehead, “that you know that.”

Richie smiles and kisses Eddie, then grabs a celery bit off of the table and gives it to Holly. Eddie leans against Richie’s chest, but with

Richie's arm around his shoulders he doesn't mind the odd angle. He watches Richie's fingers comb through the hair on Holly's head. Her head is laid in Richie's lap and she looks content.

He can't stop thinking about the video though. How the HD footage doesn't do the real experience justice, the horrible sounds it made when they punched Richie, those assholes *laughing* . Richie's blood staining the skin of his hands, Richie *not moving* . No matter how loudly he yelled Richie's name Richie wouldn't wake up and-

His fingers must tighten too much on Richie's leg, because he grabs Eddie's hand. Eddie pulls back to look up at Richie. He can't stop seeing his fucking face there on the pavement, *not moving* .

"God, Rich." Eddie runs his own hands over his face, "you weren't waking up. I just see that and I remember how you wouldn't wake up and you were bleeding and you had this *rattle* when you breathed and--"

"Eds, come on." Richie reaches for Eddie but Eddie pulls back.

"No. They hurt you so fucking much that you wouldn't wake up and god it was just like when you were in the deadlights, except your eyes were closed and it looked like you were *dead* Rich and--"

Richie doesn't move from his spot, just sits there and lets Eddie word-vomit his way through all of this. He can't tell if it pisses him off or not, but he looks at Richie and his chest is tight and he just loves him so much he can't stand it. He shoots forward, pulling Richie down with two hands on the back of his neck and smashing their lips together. Richie lets out a confused noise but Eddie just deepens the kiss, not caring that it takes Richie a moment to react.

He pulls back, a hand on Eddie's collarbone, and pants a little into their shared space. Eddie stares at him, not breaking eye contact. Richie moves a hand up to Eddie's face, but Eddie grabs his hand, pulling Richie off of the counter and pressing him back into the island with a controlling hand hard on his jaw, thumb pressing into the hollow of Richie's cheek to encourage his mouth open. He adjusts their positions so he's straddling one of Richie's legs, pulling himself up into Richie's space.

“Eds, Eds,” Richie breaks away with labored breath. But Eddie doesn’t stop, just moves to press his mouth up across Richie’s jaw, tongue finding Richie’s ear. He practically fucking melts in Eddie’s hands, sliding down a little until they’re the same height and Eddie’s able to lean up and leverage his position

“Please.” He says hotly into Richie’s ear, guiding Richie’s gaze back over to him with a hand on the opposite side of his jaw. They hold eye contact for a moment until Richie’s nodding.

“Yea, yea, fuck, okay. But you gotta do the work here dude. My ribs hurt, I’m not in a bendy mood.”

“You’re never bendy, old man.” Eddie presses another kiss to Richie’s mouth and speaks against his lips “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of you, Rich.”

“God that’s hot. Shit. Holly, c’mon, you gotta go hang out in your room, it’s time for Daddy to get fucked down.” Richie stands up and claps for Holly to follow him up the stairs.

Eddie rolls his eyes to the ceiling, curses his fate for being ridiculously in love with this fucking idiot, and then follows them.

They don’t even get far enough to worry about positions. Eddie gets on top of Richie on the bed and they end up rutting against each other until Richie grabs Eddie from his pants and finishes them off together. But when Eddie comes down, he crashes hard.

He gets his bearings back and he rolls off of Richie, flinching away when Richie tries to touch him. He practically runs to the bathroom to clean off, and slams the door behind him. Richie tries not to think much of it, just grabs a wet wipe from their nightstand and wipes himself off.

When Eddie doesn’t come back within half an hour, Richie gets worried. It’s not uncommon for Eddie to take marathon showers or long baths, but it’s the silence that gives him pause. Eddie almost always plays some kind of music or podcast while he showers. Some stupid sports talk show that Richie hates, folk or indy music, and on some blessed occasions, he’ll play the Mixtape (spotify playlist) that

Richie made for the losers. (Or the special one he made for Eddie.)

But the bathroom is silent. It must be forty minutes before he gives in, but when he eases the door open, he's not surprised by what he sees. Eddie's muttering to himself under his breath, and he's running the loofa over his skin aggressively, to the point of his skin glowing red and irritated. Richie opens the door to the walk-in shower, and practically has to shout Eddie's name before he looks up at him with red-rimmed wide eyes. He shuts the water off, and grabs one of Eddie's really nice hypo-allergenic bath towels from the linen closet.

Eddie's not necessarily *present* when Richie gets him out of the shower. He's pliant as Richie dries him off. He wants to hold him or grab his face and look for Eddie behind the haze, but he knows better. He scrubs his hands clean so he can dress Eddie and get him into bed and under a weighted blanket. Holly, still dejected from being locked out, lays on the floor outside of the door, whining.

"I'm sorry baby, Eds needs some alone time. He'll be okay, don't worry." Richie tries to comfort her and coax her downstairs, but she won't budge. He grabs one of her blankets from their bed and drapes it over her.

When Eddie walks into work on Tuesday, he's annoyingly conscious of his face. He spent half an hour this morning picking out a nice outfit. He looks nice, and these are the pants that make his ass look good (according to Richie) and he styled his hair a little loose, curl falling across his face. He hopes it will all detract from the stitches and bruising. He can't shave due to the road rash on the right half of his face.

He almost makes it to his office without getting stopped, but he has to stop and collect any messages from the office secretary and she gasps out loud when she sees him.

"Hi, yes Maia, can I just get--"

“Oh my god Eddie.” She stands up and rounds her desk, just as tall as Eddie in her heels. “What happened to you?” He flinches back from her when her thumb presses against the stitches on the side of his temple.

“Yea, it’s no big deal, I’m fine.” His smile is tight with her. She’s nice, and he generally enjoys her, but she’s young and always a little too energetic for him. “Thank you.”

He manages to hide in his office, putting the final touches on an assessment that is due for a meeting in a couple hours with a client. His coworker, Ted, knocks on his door a little before lunch time, and whistles when Eddie looks up from his standing desk.

“Ouch, Kaspbrak, you piss off the old woman this weekend?” He’s sipping on a mug of coffee as he steps into Eddie’s office. In the sunlight from Eddie’s windows, his handsome features are cut more sharply, and it kind of pisses Eddie off. Ted is a very kind, handsome man in his fifties with a beautiful wife at home and he’s always showing Eddie pictures of his grandkids. Eddie kind of hates him half the time, but that could just be because his smile makes Eddie blush.

“It’s natural” Jamilla, his therapist, had told him when he first realized he was attracted to Ted.

“How is it natural? I have my...Richie. I don’t want anyone else like that.”

“You mean you’re not interested in having a sexual relationship with anyone other than Richie?” She asked, unnervingly to the point. He glared up at her from under his lashes, but muttered a ‘yes’ in response. “It makes sense, Edward. This is the first time in a long time that you’ve let yourself be attracted to someone of the same sex. Don’t shame yourself for something as natural as thinking your coworker is handsome.”

“But...it feels wrong. Not the gay thing, well, that still feels wrong sometimes, but in my head I know it’s not. It’s Richie, it feels wrong to find Ted attractive then go home to Richie.”

“Does Richie find other men attractive?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why don’t you two talk about it? You’re both going through a similar experience with your sexualities, given what you told me about his progress, it might make him more comfortable to be able to talk to you about these things. Maybe he feels the same way you do.”

“Hey Ted, no, I’ve told you, I’m not married.” Eddie says.

“Ah come on. You’re a good looking guy, you pick up any girls this weekend? You were on vacation right?” Ted sets his mug down on Eddie’s desk, and Eddie can always see a coffee ring forming there. He chooses to focus on that instead of the compliment.

“Yea, I uh...” Eddie stops, grabs a tissue and folds it up under Ted’s mug, making Ted laugh. “No, I did go on vacation this weekend with my *partner*, we got in the middle of a bar fight with some frat kids, misdirected hit.”

“Oh *partner*, right, you’re gay.” Ted smiles, “Yea, this mysterious *partner* that you refuse to bring to office parties.”

“Trust me, if HR is in the room, we’re better off if he’s not here.” Eddie chuckles a bit, “Anyway, I’m finishing up the proposal for our three o’clock meeting. Do you want to drive down to their office together?”

“You sure you should be presenting this time?” Ted says gently, giving Eddie a *look*.

“Yea, why wouldn’t I? My team worked on it.” Eddie crosses his hands over his chest, planting his feet and raising his eyebrows at Ted.

“I mean, Eddie...”

“You got a fucking problem with it, Ted?” Eddie asks

“I’m just saying” Ted starts, putting a hand on Eddie’s bicep, “Maybe you should let one of the junior partners present for you. This,” he gestures to Eddie’s face, “isn’t exactly the business we want to advertise. Besides, they worked on it too, they know the proposal,

and it is a smaller client. It will be good experience for them.”

Eddie emails the file with a two page writeup over to Natalia, the employee he trusts the most, and spends the rest of the afternoon going through the pitch with her until they’re both frustrated and annoyed.

When Eddie gets home, he’s greeted by Holly at the door. He waits for her to sit, scratches her chin, and then puts his keys and wallet in the dish by the door. He walks into the kitchen, grabs a plate from the back of cabinet that he bought at Sam’s Club when he was in college, and locks himself in the garage where he parked the Escalade.

“Fuck!” He screams, slamming the plate on the ground and watching it burst into a million pieces. He sits on the steps in there until Richie comes in and tells him their dinner is ready.

“Harold, is that you?” Richie stuffs the phone between his ear and shoulder as he wrestles with Holly on the deck, not bothering to look at the caller ID. He’s trying to get her harness back on her, but she thinks it’s play time and god she’s huge. The old woman Voice he’s trying to do wavers as Holly fucking headbutts him.

“Son of a bitch!” He gives up, lying flat on his back on the porch and feeling for a new bruise.

“Um, Mr. Tozier?” the male voice on the other end asks hesitantly. Holly’s begun licking his face in earnest. Richie puts his hand up between them, and she takes her cue to settle down, lying half on top of him, crushing his still-tender ribs.

“Yes?” He pulls the phone away to see ‘Detective Dickhead’ written across some meme of a grumpy old man. “Oh, Detective, to what do I owe the displeasure.”

“I’ll just cut to the chase here, we think we may have found the men

involved in this. We're bringing them in for questioning. Wanted to give you a heads up."

"Ah shit." Richie groans, and turns his head over to look in through the open bay windows of the house. He can see Eddie in the kitchen; All of their cups are laid out on the counter, and Eddie's got his blue rubber gloves on up to his forearms, a loose designer shirt tucked into the waistband of his jeans. He's got his soccer game pulled up on his iPad, and he's shouting at the players as he scrubs imaginary specks and spots from their glasses.

This is the second time he's done this in the month since the attack.

Richie's come downstairs in the middle of the night to Eddie scrubbing the grout on their kitchen floor. He's come home to Eddie cleaning the oven and washing every piece of clothing in the house. Eddie cleaning the house was worrying, but it was a comfort that Richie wouldn't begrudge him. (It was vastly better than Eddie coming out of the shower red and scrubbed raw.)

Richie's not perfect. He's refused to go grocery shopping because he knows he'll pick up a bottle. After one rough night and a 3AM Postmates order for Bourbon, Eddie changed his account password. Richie hasn't asked for the account back. He's been ghosting anyone that he used to do drugs with, and when the itch gets too bad, sometimes he can convince Eddie to smoke a joint with him and walk on the beach.

"Is this gonna be public?"

"Not if we can help it. Do you want to inform Mr. Kaspbrak, or should I—"

"-No." Richie cuts him off, watching Eddie shout at his iPad, throwing suds all over the floor, "I'll tell him, don't worry about it."

The balance between them is delicate. Eddie's finally well enough that he doesn't mind sleeping in the same bed as Richie at night, which is good because sleeping alone has not been going well for Richie these past couple weeks. Eddie kisses him again, and doesn't pump hand sanitizer after Richie holds his hand. They're finally

working their way back to whatever normal was for them.

Eddie doesn't need to know.

The world behind Eddie glows blue, and he looks fucking ethereal above Richie. Richie's lungs are tight, and his eyes burn, and shocks reverberate through his whole body. He's fucking frozen to the ground of the Cistern, flesh congealing to the wet rock floor. The wind blows a strand of hair on Eddie's head and his doe-eyes are wide and bright and excited and Richie's body is in a dozen different dimensions all at once. Eight year old Eddie winning a game of duck duck goose in class, twelve year old Eddie coming up out of the water after the leap, a fifteen year old Eddie flushing his medication down the toilet, an Eddie in college lying in bed after kissing a boy at a party. They're all there in his face, layered over one another, moving in slow motion.

Richie sees Eddie getting stabbed through the chest. Eddie's disemboweled over him, fingers poke through his eye sockets and his jaw is ripped off. He sees the claw pierce through his skull, Eddie's limp body falling against Richie's chest, Eddie's guts and brain matter splattered across Richie's face, Eddie's arm getting *pulled off* and Eddie--

"Rich!" He can hear through the white-out in his ears. It's fucking magical to hear his name on Eddie's tongue it's a brand on his skin with a cool salve. It's everything.

But no, Eddie's still there and he's saying Richie's name over and over again and he can see all of these different realities overlapping. No. No. NO.

Eddie's hands are on Richie's shoulders, and he grabs Eddie wrist in a death grip, throwing his weight and heaving Eddie off to the side, rolling with him. Eddie yelps in pain, and he can feel the blood in his mouth, can taste the copper of it as they *fall* .

Eddie screams, but Richie keeps the arm around his shoulder, pulling him tight to his chest. Eddie's talking he can feel it, but he can't hear anything over the pounding of his heartbeat, the whistle of the wind in the cistern, the soft carpet beneath them. Richie's hands are slick with blood - *so much fucking blood* - but he tightens his grip on Eddie. Eddie tries to get free, he's struggling in Richie's grip, but he hasn't seen everything Richie has seen he hasn't seen himself die, he can't taste it.

It feels like forever, but Eddie stops squirming, one palm and his forehead pressed flat against Richie's chest. He can't hear Pennywise, can't hear others screaming. The whistle of the wind softens but his hands are still clammy where he's gripping the back of Eddie's t-shirt like a lifeline.

"It's okay Rich, you're okay." He can make out Eddie's words now, they're muffled against his chest. Richie forces his fingers to relax around Eddie's wrist, closes his eyes and breathes in tandem with the rise and fall of Eddie's chest. "Come back to me, Rich." Eddie's voice is so soft, not bright, not scared. He's not crying in pain, he's not...he's not hurt.

Richie searches for the texture of floor beneath them, trying to commit the feeling of the carpet to memory, trying to replace the idea blood on his body with sweat, tries to fucking calm down and ground himself. Eddie moves, and Richie keeps one hand fisted in the back of his shirt, but rolls with it when Eddie pushes him onto his back and kneels up next to him. He lets Eddie press a hand to his face, tries to focus on the smell of the ocean and not the fucking sewage from the cistern.

"There you go, Rich. You're doing so good." Richie opens his eyes and moves his hand from Eddie's t-shirt to his bicep, sliding up the sleeve to feel the white scar there. A Scar. Not a wound.

It's like every string holding his tension is cut and he relaxes against the floor with a sob. Eddie's moving around him, a hand on his face, moving his own hands into position across his chest, but Richie's head is so fucking foggy.

When he comes to, he's lying on his side on the floor in the recovery

position next to Eddie, a wet rag on his forehead and Eddie's fingers running through his hair. His face feels swollen, he's got a pulsing migraine, and every inch of his body *aches*. Riche moves a hand out to grip weakly at a corner of Eddie's t-shirt where it pools around his thighs.

"Rich?" Eddie tests.

Richie wants to make a dumb quip but if he opens his mouth he's going to cry again, so he just nods numbly. Eddie leans over, putting his head down on the ground in Richie's line of sight. Richie tries to smile and presses his index finger to the tip of Eddie's nose.

"Hey man," Eddie says.

"Hey." He forces out. His voice is rough, but he's not crying so that's a plus. "Fancy seeing you here."

"You feel okay?" Eddie ventures, grimacing in understanding when Richie just shakes his head back and forth. "I'll be right back." He pushes Richie's sweaty hair back off of his forehead. Richie closes his eyes

Eddie draws a bath in Richie's 'stupid fucking rich person' bathtub with some fancy CBD bath salts Eddie's therapist recommended. *'We could just smoke weed'* Richie had told him when he saw them in the bathroom, to which he got a resounding *'go fuck yourself'* in return. Eddie has to shoulder the brunt of Richie's weight because his body has not reconnected to his brain, and Eddie strips him methodically, taking the time to put the sweat-drenched clothes into his hamper.

"Here, just get in, Rich." Eddie says, trying to swing Richie's legs around into the tub, but Richie grabs Eddie gently by the arm, tracing the line of the scar there.

"Stay?" he asks. He knows he needs to give Eddie his time to adjust again, to work through this, but god he needs him. He hasn't asked, hasn't pushed Eddie beyond what he was willing to give freely, but just for tonight, he needs Eddie there. He wants to be held, to be comforted.

When Eddie turns around to strip himself, Richie sees a line of red dripping down his neck.

“Eddie, what is that?” He asks.

“What’s what?”

“On your neck.”

Eddie puts a hand to the back of his head, and pulls his fingers away with blood on them. “Fuck” he mutters under his breath, grabbing an already red-stained rag from the counter and pressing it to the back of his head. He watches Eddie compress the wound until it’s no longer bleeding.

“Did I do that?” he asks, his own voice tired and quiet.

“No. It’s nothing, Rich. Don’t worry about it.” Eddie tries, but Richie grabs his fingers weakly, looking at the red-stained skin.

“What happened?” Eddie looks down at him, those fucking doe-eyes sad and concerned.

“You were having a nightmare, I tried to wake you up and it was one of those things where you were kind of asleep, kind of awake and you just...you tried to roll away but we fell off of the bed and I hit my head on the nightstand. I’m fine, it’s not deep. Head wounds just bleed like crazy.” He pulls his fingers out of Richie’s grip, instead stepping between Richie’s legs and lifting his face up with a hand under his chin. “I’m fine. It’s not a big deal. We’ve both had worse nightmares. There wasn’t even any screaming this time.”

Richie, hands settled on Eddie’s hips looks up at him. He looks fucking tired. The black eye is fading, but the bags under his eyes never will, the hollows in his cheeks are deep, and he looks a little strung out, the way he always does when he’s anything other than well-rested and calm. Richie examines the small lines where his stitches were recently removed and the healing pink road rash on the side of his face.

He grabs Eddie’s hand from under his chin and presses a kiss to his palm.

“Well, get in babe, I’m little spoon tonight.” he swats lightly at Eddie’s ass. Eddie laughs.

Eddie is off on Friday’s and Richie doesn’t have any plans so they have their first ‘date night’ since coming back. Eddie runs to the store to grab what they need, and then they make some pasta and garlic bread, play with Holly, and sing along to one of Richie’s new ‘mix tapes’.

“I’m just saying, it’s not a mix tape if it’s on Spotify, Rich.” Eddie tosses a bit of carrot at Richie where he’s dancing in place, looking for the next song to play.

“I make the best mix tapes and you know it, babe.” Richie puts another pretzel stick in his mouth, switching the song over.

“I remember.” Eddie says, taste-testing the alfredo to make sure it was right.

“You remember my mix-tape?” Richie asks, finally deciding on some Elton John.

“Of course dude.” Eddie rolls his eyes. “You gave it to me right before I left town and I spent that entire night listening to it on repeat and crying.”

“Awe babe, you cried? How embarrassing.” Richie grins.

“This song was on there.” Eddie switches the stove off, happy with the consistency.

“I put Tiny Dancer on your mixtape?” Richie snorts.

“Yep. I remember this one was first and it made me laugh and ‘Your Song’ was on like, halfway through the tape and that’s what made me cry.” Eddie smiles to himself, spooning out the pasta onto their plates.

“Tween me was pathetic. How did you not realize I was stupid in love with you?” Richie shakes his head and grabs some of Eddie’s shitty white wine for both of them. They both head over to the table where Holly is already lying underneath, hopelessly waiting for food scraps she knows she won’t get.

“Maybe I did? I don’t know. I kept that tape forever, and then CD’s were a thing and I forgot you existed. Maybe it’s in storage somewhere.” Eddie shrugs and eats a spoonful of his pasta.

They eat, Eddie talks about work, and Richie tries not to look too hard at the fading marks along the side of Eddie’s face. Eddie’s on a rant about some mistake Maia made at work when Richie’s phone buzzes. He picks it up and the name on the caller ID makes his blood run a little colder.

Detective Dickhead

We’re arresting the suspects.

“What is it, Rich?” Richie looks up from his phone and Eddie’s got a little dollop of pasta on his garlic bread, using his fingers to keep the noodles contained as he shoves it into his mouth. Eddie’s voice is perfectly calm, his shoulders relaxed. He didn’t scrub the wine glass before using it, and he didn’t make Richie scrub his hands before eating.

“Nothing. Mike just sent me some meme.” Richie brushes off the question. “Continue. What did Maia tell Ted?”

Eddie doesn’t need to know (he lies to himself.)

Notes for the Chapter:

TW: Just a bunch of manic behavior really, also brief depictions of gore in a nightmare.

Have some softness, we haven't had a lot of that so far lmao

They're both handling things in their own healthy and unhealthy ways. Also everyone say hello to Holly she is my favorite thing in the world. She's a cream-colored Golden Retriever.

6. But lend me your heart and I'll just let you fall

Summary for the Chapter:

Please check the TW's on this one if anything in the tags has given you pause.

Local Men receive Hate Crime charges in the assault of Richie Tozier

Kansas City Star

Terry Schumacher, Wallace Thomas, and Kyle Redford were arrested last week in connection with the assault of Comedian Richie Tozier that took place last month. Today at their arraignment, instead of the fourth degree assault charge that was expected, all three men were charged with two counts of “third degree assault with motivation by discrimination” and bond is set at \$50,000 for all three men.

For anyone unfamiliar with the terminology, “motivation by discrimination” is used when the courts are seeking to pursue charges under Missouri Revised Statute 557.035. The Hate Crime statute, which changes the charges from a Class A Misdemeanour to a Class D Felony, increasing the possible jail time from one year to seven.

Missouri Hate Crime statute classifies discrimination under “race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation or disability of the victim or victims.”

The second victim in this case has, to this day, chosen to remain anonymous. However, it would be remiss of this paper not to disclose that in court today, and to be reflected in public record, the victim's name is Edward Kaspbrak. This paper has yet to receive confirmation of Mr. Kaspbrak's exact identity as no other information has been released.

Hate Crime charges are notoriously difficult to prosecute, and one has to wonder why the courts are pursuing them for two straight

white men attacked late at night in the city. Kansas City Police Department have declined to comment on these new Hate Crime charges attached to the assault. Tozier has spoken of the issue only a few times, but some information may be gleaned from a viral video that circulated last month of him addressing the attack to his audience. (See here)

“Those ____ said some nasty ____ to us before, during and after they bashed my head into the pavement, so let me just be perfectly ____ clear. If you hate people because of the color of their skin, their race, religion, sexuality, gender identity, any of that new-age ____ we didn’t get to talk about in the 80’s: you’re a piece of ____ and you can get ____.” Tozier says in the video.

Given the attackers have been charged with a Hate Crime, this speech, and the tight-lipped nature of everyone involved with the case, one can only wonder what Tozier and Kaspbrak were doing that would result in these charges.

TMZ @TMZ Who is Edward Kaspbrak? Why were Hate Crime charges filed against men who attacked Richie Tozier? Read more below

Perez Hilton @PerezHilton Richie Tozier’s gay?! His boyfriend revealed!

Jo Jo Sea Wah @Tabeley @PerezHilton Holy shit Trashmouth’s queer?

RichieCalledMeBabe @Trashstan @PerezHilton It’s really not fucking cool of you guys to assume Tozier is gay, and if he is gay, it’s horrible of you @KCStar and @TMZ to out him like this.

People Magazine @People A court reporter for the @KCStar has

revealed the name of the second victim and that *@Trashmouth* 's attackers have been charged with a Hate Crime. Tozier has yet to comment on the matter and Twitter is running wild with speculation.

Bi Bi Bi @Georgeonell I always thought he was gay. He's always had that aggressively straight thing going on.

Isabella @FakeNudes Maybe we should have known when he said Gay Rights in Colorado lmao

Theresa Brody @Cakerner Good to know that in the year of our lord, 2017, we're out-ing people on twitter. Talk about a fucking hate crime.

Erase Student Debt @Mindle_2 @KCStar whatever the fuck happened to journalistic integrity? What the fuck is wrong with you?

Bill Denbrough

I'm heading over now. Hour with traffic?

Okay. Paps at gate.

Let me know if you need anything.

Beverly

He hasn't responded to me since he hung up on me. Been over an hour.

I'm almost home

He's not picking up Stan's calls either.

Eddie practically shoulders himself into the house. He rips the keys from the lock, throws them to the side and doesn't even bother taking his shoes off before running in.

"Rich!?" he shouts, spinning around looking for the man. Music is blaring through the surround sound in the house, but it's not Richie's usual "bops" playlist, instead it's some old Alt Rock that's depressingly somber. The house smells like weed.

He checks the entirety of the downstairs before finding Richie sitting on the floor in the kitchen, his back to the island. Holly glances up at Eddie when he rounds the corner, but stays with her head lying on Richie's thigh, sad eyes looking up at him. Richie's got one hand stroking in her coat and one clutched around a tumbler of Whiskey, he's nodding along to the music, but it's lazy and slow and Eddie can already tell he's a little fucked up.

Eddie opens the app to control the house's surround sound and turns the volume down.

"Hey." Richie pouts, still not looking at Eddie. "was list'nin to that."

"Richie." Eddie starts, pushing down the heaviness in his chest. "Rich, where did you get that?"

"Wha'?" Richie slurs, but when he gestures with his left hand some of the Whiskey sloshes onto his arm. He licks it off. "Oh this? Postmates baby."

"Damnit." Eddie runs his hands over his face and kneels down to take the glass from Richie, spying the half empty bottle off to his side. Richie isn't giving up on the glass though. "Give it to me, Rich."

“No.” Richie yanks the glass from Eddie’s grip, clutching it to his chest and spilling some down his shirt.

“Rich, I’m not fucking around.” Eddie tries but Richie just kicks a leg out to shove Eddie away, knocking him back onto his ass. Eddie bites down on the instinctual swell of anger, knowing it’s not what Richie needs right now.

“Fuck off.” Richie slurs.

“Rich,” Eddie scoots closer on his knees, testing the waters with a hand on Richie’s thigh. It’s delayed by a couple seconds, but Richie looks down at Eddie’s hand, and then slowly brings his eyes up to look at Eddie’s face. He begins to smile, but quickly his expression crumbles and he’s hiding his face with the hand holding the whiskey.

“Babe.” Eddie says, heart breaking at Richie’s expression. He pulls himself closer so he can wipe the tears from Richie’s cheeks. He pulls Richie’s arm away and cups his face, “you’re okay Richie, it’s gonna be okay.”

“I’m sorry.” He gasps between the sobs that wrack his chest.

“You have nothing to apologize for.” Eddie tries but Richie shakes his head, dislodging Eddie’s hands.

“They weren’t s’posed to know your name and you weren’t supposed to know but now everyone knows and...and...”

“And what?” Eddie tries, bending down to try and meet Richie’s gaze, “So what? Everyone knows my name now? It doesn’t matter to me, I’ll be okay. You’re what’s important, none of that matters right now.”

Richie makes an angry sound and struggles up to his feet, reaching up to grip the counter a couple times before getting a good hold. Holly scrambles to her feet and backs up to sit closer to Eddie, weary of the energy Richie’s giving off right now.

Eddie takes a step forwards, but Richie stops him and wipes his face with his free hand, rubbing the snot off on his shirt sleeve.

"It's not fair." He spits, taking one large, final swig of his cup and slamming it down on the counter. Eddie winces, but it doesn't shatter like he expects. Richie turns to cough, and Eddie takes the moment to shoot forward and grab the Whiskey bottle from the floor

"Tha's mine." Richie says, reaching across the counter for it, but Eddie crosses the kitchen towards the sink. "Fucking don't." Richie warns, but Eddie doesn't even entertain the idea. He holds the bottle over the sink, emptying the amber liquid down the drain.

"Fuck you, Eddie!" Richie shouts. Eddie watches him run his hands down his face, screaming a bit into his palms in frustration.

"You don't need it." Eddie says, trying to ignore Richie. Holly pads out of the kitchen, probably going for her corner in the living room to get away from the tense energy between them.

"You don't fucking know what I need." Richie hisses. Eddie sets the empty whiskey bottle on the island, crosses his arms and stares at Richie. Richie glares at the bottle and then at Eddie. "Fuking hate you sometimes." Richie spits, grabbing the tumbler, spinning around and throwing it at the wall farthest from either of them. As the glass shatters against the wall, Eddie yelps, jumping back, and he can hear Holly whine in the other room.

Once the glass stops clattering against the floor, the silence between them becomes pregnant and Eddie's almost afraid to break it. No, he's not afraid of Richie, he just doesn't...he doesn't know how to deal with Richie when he's like this.

"Why didn't that make me feel better?" Richie asks quietly, leaning back against the counter, "that always makes you feel better, why doesn't any of this make me feel better?" He can hear Richie's voice choking again.

Eddie ventures closer to Richie, watching carefully for glass on the floor. Richie's barefoot, wearing only an oversized t-shirt and some boxers. Eddie grabs Richie carefully, pulling him away from the glass and out of the kitchen. Richie's pliant for him as he drags him over to the couch.

“C’mere Hol’.” Eddie pats the couch next to Richie, and she’s reluctant but she comes back over, lying with her head on his lap again. Eddie runs Richie’s hair off of his face, grabbing the glasses and setting them on the coffee table. “I’ll be right back.”

With shaky breath, Eddie leaves Richie on the couch and disappears into the kitchen. He grabs the dust pan from the hall closet and gets to work, sweeping up the hundreds of shards of glass scattered over the kitchen floor. He mops the floor methodically, scrubs alcohol from the counters, and throws away the remaining ashes of the joint Richie smoked. He shuts the music off.

Richie is dozing on the couch right where Eddie left him, face pressed into the fabric of the couch, looking out but not really seeing anything. Eddie tries to suffocate the panic that’s beginning to burn in his stomach. He lifts Richie up so that Eddie can settle against the arm of the couch. Richie’s conscious enough to move himself around, until he can lie with his head on Eddie’s chest, one of Eddie’s arms around his shoulders.

This is the only thing that ever really seems to work with Richie, and Eddie hates it. He doesn’t hate helping Richie, far from it, he just wishes it were as simple as cleaning cups or making him food but no, Richie needs *comfort*. He just needs someone to be there for him, be there with him when these things happen. Sometimes it’s harder for Eddie than it sounds.

“I’m so sorry, Rich.” Eddie says, carding his fingers through Richie’s hair, gently untangling it as he goes. Richie rests one hand on Eddie’s side, fingers clenched tightly in the dress shirt, wrinkling the fabric. Eddie glances down and disentangles Richie’s hand, spreading it out so he can twine their fingers together, holding onto him. Holly is still there with her head resting on Eddie’s hip and her large body squished between Richie’s thighs.

“I’m sorry.” Richie says once they’re settled. With the house silent except for their breathing, they can hear the ocean outside, waves crashing on the beach. Eddie leans down to put his cheek on Richie’s head.

“There’s nothing to be sorry for, Rich.”

"No, for me." Richie looks up, "I don't hate you. Shouldn't've said that."

"I know," Eddie smiles, tilting Richie's chin up to kiss him. It's a chaste kiss, but he can still taste the weed and whiskey on his mouth. He pulls back with a smile, brushing his hair back. "I love you, Rich. It's gonna take a lot more than that to get rid of me."

When Bill gets there later, he lets himself into the house with a spare key he got long before Eddie moved in. Richie had dozed off, so Eddie extracts himself from the couch carefully so as not to wake him. They go out to walk along the shore, pant legs rolled up and using some old sandals by the back door.

"So, he's not taking it well, I see." Bill breaks the silence between them. Eddie huffs something that sounds like a laugh, but keeps his arms crossed.

"Yea no, uh, came home to him high and drunk, which, he got that alcohol impressively fast honestly."

"Yea I could smell that when I walked in." Bill's hands are shoved in the pockets of his jeans. "Nothing hard?"

"No, we keep weed in the house, but he'd have to talk to someone to get coke or anything else, so thankfully that didn't happen." Bill nods along, and then diverts his path to walk down to the water line.

"God I can't f-fucking believe they would do that. Well, I guess I can believe it, the media's the fucking worst...." Bill shakes his head, "What about you, how are you taking this?"

"Me? Oh I'm fine," Eddie kicks some sand around a shell buried there, trying to dislodge it without touching it.

"Ed, you don't have to be okay with it. They told everyone your name, that's a big deal."

“Honestly, Bill?” Eddie ventures, clenching his fists in the pocket where his inhaler once lived, “I kind of have to be okay or we’re both going to fall apart. I’ll be fine. I’m already out, to my coworkers and all of you guys, my assistant will be pissed about all of the calls she’s gonna have to screen but, at the end of the day, life doesn’t change for me.

“Richie, on the other hand?” Eddie shakes his head to dislodge the hair being blown into his eyes by the wind, “They fucking *outed* him and this thing with him, with *us*, it’s still so new. It’s hard for us to talk about it with *each other* half the time, now he’s going to have to make some public statement about it? I just...he hasn’t even told his mom yet.”

“It’s bullshit.” Bill tries to smile at Eddie. Eddie wonders if Bill knows the effect he has, the one that makes it hard for Eddie to remember how angry he is.

“Yea,” he laughs humorlessly, “fucking sucks.”

Bill crosses the small distance between them and throws an arm over Eddie’s shoulders. They continue their walk in relative silence.

Later, Richie wakes up and they coax him back to the sober world with pizza and grape soda and a ‘Richie Tozier movie marathon’ as Bill called it. A collection of movies that scared the piss out of Eddie as a kid but are laughable in retrospect: The Birds, The Thing, The Blob.

Eddie’s been keeping Richie’s phone, giving Steve perfunctory responses occasionally, but letting him know “no Richie’s not okay to talk right now.” Eventually Steve just texted Eddie’s phone instead. He keeps Richie’s phone on silent, but half way through some horrible melted bubblegum effect, his phone gets a call Eddie wasn’t expecting. Richie’s still a little out of it and leaning heavily against Bill so he doesn’t notice, but Bill sees Eddie tense.

Bill gives him a questioning look. Eddie grimaces down at the phone before leaning over onto Richie, who looks at him with hazy eyes.

“It’s your Mom, do you want me to tell her you’ll talk to her later?” Richie stares at the phone, expression stricken, but he doesn’t respond.

The call disconnects before Richie responds, but ultimately he just shakes his head, going back to muttering about the acting and cinematography with Bill. Eddie grabs Holly (and his plastic gloves and doggy bags) to take her for a walk before returning the call.

“Richie?!” Maggie Tozier’s strained voice answers immediately. For a moment, Eddie hears his mother in her voice, concern and worry and fear. But Maggie is not Sonia.

“No um...hello Mrs. Tozier this is Eddie. Eddie Kas-”

“Of course I remember you, dear.” she scoffs. “Where’s Richard, is he okay?” Eddie winces at that.

“Well...yes?” He looks back at the house over his shoulder, “He’s *going* to be okay, at least. He’s just not up for taking phone calls right now.”

“Oh” her voice, still worried sounds disappointed and on instinct Eddie hurries to try and fix it.

“It’s nothing bad, he’s just...this has just been really hard for him. I didn’t want you to worry, so I told him I’d call you, let you know he’s alright.” She’s silent for a moment that seems to stretch for an eternity.

“Is it true?” She ventures, voice eerily calm, “what those news people are saying about him?...About you two?” Eddie feels his shoulders tighten up.

“Mrs Tozier I...I should really let you talk to Richie about that. He should be okay to talk tomorrow, tonight is just hard for him and-”

“Okay,” she says. He can hear a shaky exhale from her side of the line, “you just...You just tell him I love him, okay?” Eddie’s throat

feels tight, and he nods even though she can't hear him, "you tell him I love him and if he doesn't call me back soon I'm flying out there."

"Oh Mrs. Tozier that won't be-"

"-you tell him." Her voice is stern, no wiggle room.

"Yes ma'am." He responds automatically, hating himself for it. "I think he'll be happy to hear that."

"He should be." she says, clearing her throat, "Well you take care of him, alright?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Goodnight Edward."

"Goodnight."

Coming home from Derry, to the big empty house, with its' tall ceilings and expensive impersonal furniture was like a shock to the system. He tried to go back to normal, called up Steve and his publicist and tried to make amends for Chicago. His publicist had released a statement saying he had a "sudden unforeseen emergency" and Richie wasn't interested in elaborating.

He very quickly turned the corner on high functioning and went into not functioning at all. He fell back in with old friends, old drugs, and partying to fill the void. Except he had people to fill the void of loneliness this time, it was just the nauseous pit in his stomach he couldn't fill. The one that echoed '*I know your secret, your dirty little secret*'. The one that made him feel shame when a cute guy caught him looking, the one that made his skin crawl when someone gave him a knowing look.

It was a blur, really. But he was good at pretending for Steve, for their snapchat group, for the group text. That is, until he accidentally

drunk dialed Bill in the middle of a blackout. Richie, to this day, does not believe he took too many pills. But Bill let himself in with the spare key, and found Richie passed out on his bathroom floor, the house smelling like weed, alcohol on his breath, and an empty pill bottle on the bathroom counter.

There's nothing to rekindle a friendship quite like having to shove your fingers down your friend's throat because you think they've overdosed. Thankfully Bill didn't call an ambulance. Richie didn't know how Steve would explain that one to the press.

After that, Richie thinks they all put themselves on Richie Watch 2k17. Stan flew out to stay with him for the first week, then Bill and Audra would come by and force-feed him real food for dinner once or twice a week, Bev called him constantly. Stan hit him upside the head and forced him to call his therapist back up and start his appointments again.

He got some anti-depressants that made the world a little less bleak, made it a little easier to get out of bed. And, in a fit of manic energy, he burst into his therapists' office on his third visit by announcing "I think I like dick."

Stewart blinked like an owl, jotted a note down, and then replied simply "Okay. Let's talk about that."

A few days before Eddie would show up and deep-clean his house, Richie was lounging in his living room, some cute dog videos playing in the background while he ate some "zoodle" dish Audra made him the day prior. He was scrolling through the recommended when he saw a video titled "Abandoned and sick in a parking lot, this dog NEEDED help" which is how he proceeded to spend the rest of the evening watching dog rescue videos on youtube and **not** crying (thank you very much.)

There was one dog in particular, a little thing that struggled for her life at first but then just collapsed into the woman's arms once they caught her. Richie did cry at that one, and he almost choked on the fucking zoodles while he did it. He went to bed but lay there for hours looking up dog rescues in the area, closing the tab, and then looking again.

It was an impulse decision, one he couldn't make at 3am. But when he woke up in the morning and was pulling up google to look up the lyrics to some song stuck in his head, he saw the dog rescue page again. His house was empty, cavernous, and way too big to just be him. He's not supposed to have parties at his house anymore, on *everyone's* orders, but...well maybe he *was* lonely. It was one thing to have the Losers over text or snapchat, and to have Bill come by once a week. But Bill had Audra, Stan had Patty, Ben and Bev had each other and Eddie had...Eddie wasn't alone either. Just Richie, with a stifling silence in his home.

He filled out the application on a whim, and tried to forget about it. But a few days later, while Bill and Audra were at his house preparing some spinach quiche dish, he got the email clearing his application to adopt.

"What's that?" Audra asked, looking over his shoulder.

"Oh um..." Richie locked his phone and put it in his pocket, "Nothing, just an email from Steve. Someone asking to interview me about my breakdown, you know the usual."

And she let it go.

He was too afraid to go the next day, but Saturday, waking up with the void inside him feeling sickly, he threw on a presentable outfit, tied his greasy hair back in the smallest little ponytail, and drove into town.

Holly was scared when he first saw her. The other dogs were excited, barking and bright, but she was curled up in her corner when he saw her; A large cream-colored retriever with big brown doe eyes and floppy ears. She was scared, backed into the corner of the pen she shared with another dog and only looking up to glance at Richie. He asked the attendant if she was sick.

"No, she's healthy, just been here for a while. Dogs get lonely too." The young girl says with a bitter smile.

They put Richie in a room with a couch, and brought Holly to him a few minutes later. (Well, her name was Poppy at that time.) She

cowered in the corner for the first few minutes, and Richie just kind of sat on the floor next to her, trying to coax her over to him with outstretched fingers.

“She’s kinda shy.” The attendant said, kneeling next to her and speaking to her quietly, petting her head. “Why don’t you come over here?”

“She’s not gonna bite me, right?”

“I don’t think so, no.” The girl smiles.

“Sweet.”

He lay down next to her on the floor, putting his face next to hers. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye, and then covered her muzzle with one of her paws like she was scared. Maybe that was the moment Richie knew.

“Okay, you’re the cutest thing I’ve ever seen.” Richie said gently, and the girl chuckled.

Holly heard the girl laugh, and then looked at Richie, pawing ever so slightly closer to him. Richie put the back of his hand in front of her, letting her sniff at his fingers. “Don’t be mad if I smell bad,” he told her quietly. She licked at the back of his fingers tentatively, and didn’t protest when Richie stroked down the back of her head.

“So this is Poppy, she’s about five years old. She was rescued from the side of the freeway, so we don’t know exactly what her home life was like. We know she’s got some separation anxiety, but once she warms up to you she’s very energetic and requires a bit more attention than most dogs. She does well with other dogs, and we’re working on some simple training for her, so we’d like you to continue that training. Does all of this sound like something you can provide for her?”

“I uh” Richie looked at Holly’s eyes and the way she’d glance up at him from under her brow bone and then avert her gaze. “Yea I mean, so what? She’s a little needy? Aren’t we all?”

The girl chuckled, but stayed stern, “She needs a lot of attention. She

gets really attached to her caretakers, so if you're not prepared to commit to her, she might not be the best fit for you."

Richie rubbed her ear between two of his fingers. Abandoned, lonely, gets attached too easily. "She's perfect." Richie says, looking up at the young girl, "Can I like...take her?"

It took her awhile to adjust. He gave her a ridiculously expensive dog bed for the corner a stockpile of toys, and way too much food to try and win her trust. She let him pet her, but didn't usually initiate contact. The only thing that really got her excited was when Richie brought the leash over to take her for a walk.

"What the fuck?" Bill said, when him and Audra walked in on Richie sprawled on the floor, playing tug-of-war with Holly and one of her toys.

"Uh, hey." He said, hands slipping from the toy, letting Holly take her prize with a wagging tail. When she looked over and saw Bill though, she got scared, cowering next to Richie on the floor.

"Oh no, hey baby, you're okay." Richie strokes down her back, talking sweet to her to calm her down. "Bill, don't be a dickhead." he said in a falsely pleasant tone to try and ease her.

"Don't be a...?" Bill looked at Audra with an open mouth, "How and I being a dickhead?"

"Be nice to my baby, she's sensitive." Richie bent over, putting his cheek on Holly's head and smiling up at Bill.

"You're sensitive," Bill muttered, but Audra pushed past him into the house, shoving the grocery bag into Bill's arms.

"Who is this sweet girl?" Audra said kindly, kneeling down in front of Holly on the floor. Holly perked up at her voice, letting Audra pet her, panting, and licking the inside of her wrist appreciatively.

"What the fuck, why does she like you more than me?" Richie crossed his arms, pouting. Holly scrambled up to sit in front of Audra and lick her face.

“What can I say, I’m just loveable.” Audra teased.

“Anyway, her name is Holly, I got her like, two days ago.”

“Why?” Bill asked, coming over to pet Holly.

“Well, her name was Poppy but I hated that, so I named her Buddy Holly. Turns out she’s a lady and prefers Holly, but overall I think the name is a big upgrade.”

“Not the name, numbskull,” Bill shoved Richie’s head lightly, “Why’d you get a dog?”

“I don’t know,” Richie pet down Holly’s flank, and she turned from Audra to nudge her head into Richie’s hand, “I think she needed me.”

And it was true, but Richie needed her too. He needed a reason to get out of bed in the morning, he had to take Holly out to piss in the mornings, he couldn’t just ignore that. He had to feed her, take care of her, and in taking care of her, it forced Richie to take care of himself. It also helped to have someone in his bed with him to calm him after a deadlights dream, to have someone to distract him when he wants the bottle, when he’s itching for a high.

He needed Holly just as much as she needed him. It’s really fucking pathetic, and he told his therapist as such, but it was easier to openly love someone knowing they would never reject you. She really was his baby.



Eddie has one day left in the week and a very important meeting he can't miss, so in the morning, he kisses Richie goodbye, takes care of Holly and then he's out the door. Bill had slept over the night before so Richie wouldn't be alone, and Eddie was planning to leave early after his meeting.

He originally gets out his sunglasses and hat and a dark hoodie to avoid the photographers, but thinks better of it. It's out now. There's no need to hide it at this point. Besides, maybe getting some photos of Eddie would take the heat off of Richie a bit.

He chooses his outfit very deliberately. Tight navy pants, a cream-colored button down, top button fastened against his throat and blazer overtop. He works on his hair in the mirror until it's perfect, watch fastened perfectly square on his wrist, belt snug on his waist. It's comforting, in its own way, to have an outward perfection when he feels held together with duct tape and bubble gum inside. He has to be held together for Richie right now, he's had his own time to break down.

Sunglasses dim the flash of the cameras. He wonders, as he drives

past them, why they're still outside of the neighborhood, what kind of juicy photos they're hoping to get. He spends the forty minute drive to his office cursing all of them out with increasingly creative language.

"Eddie!" Maia shouts at him as he enters the office, pushing herself up from her desk, prepared to chase him into his office. Her phone is ringing. He takes his headphones out and his sunglasses off, leveling her with a look.

"Yes, Maia." Her eyes widen a bit, and for just a moment she shrinks to back down at his sharp tone, then she rises to her full height, taller than him in her heels, and juts her chin up.

"You have about a hundred messages."

"Anything important?" She blinks owlishly down at her notepad, flipping through the pages of sticky notes posted there. "Anything not work related, just say no-comment. I'll take these and look through them okay?"

She seems relieved as she nods, handing the pad over to him.

"Thank you, and I'm sorry you have to deal with this, but don't give my direct line out unless it's a client. Lunch is on me today, okay?"

It's going to take Eddie hours to pour through all of these requests. One of the younger guys that works up front with Maia comes in with a steaming cup of coffee about half an hour later and Eddie contemplates promising his first born, but just thanks him profusely and gets to work. It takes the rest of the hour to go through all of the messages scrawled in the notepad. He highlights everything work-related, only three or four calls, and puts the rest of the notebook in his travel bag. He'll forward all of it to Steve later.

It's not long before there's a knock at his door.

"Eddie?" Ted asks tentatively, stepping into the office.

"Yes, Ted?" He asks, head down putting the final touches on his notes for the evaluation he has to deliver later.

“Eddie.” Ted says, leaning over Eddie’s desk to turn off the monitor. Eddie’s head snaps up, hand tightening dangerously around his pencil.

“Ted, what have I fucking said about touching my--”

“What’s going on, Eddie.” Ted says, leaning on the corner of Eddie’s desk.

“You’re gonna have to be more specific than that.” Eddie purses his lips.

“Okay,” Ted clears his throat, “are you dating that comedian?”

It feels like a slap across the face. Eddie throws his pencil down on the desk, leaning back in his chair and running a hand over his face. “You really don’t beat around the fucking bush, do you?”

“Yea well, you’re cagey, can’t risk you running off with some lame excuse.” Ted smiles down at Eddie, nudging his chair with the toe of his shoes, “C’mon, talk to me man. The front office kids have been pulling their hair out all morning, you’re gonna have to be real nice to them from now on.”

“Yea I know,” Eddie sighs, “I...I clearly did not plan on this happening. It was pretty rough last night.”

“I assume this is the mysterious boyfriend you refuse to bring by the office, then?” Ted teases, but it makes Eddie’s throat feel inflamed. Reluctantly, he nods. “How’s he doing?”

“Not fucking good.” Eddie says “I left him at home with a friend, but I’m going home after our meeting today. I’m sorry, I know I need to tie stuff up, but I gotta...he needs me and...”

“It’s okay, Eddie.” Ted smiles, “You have to take care of your family. God knows you’ve covered for me enough times when I had to pick up the grandkids at the last moment. Give me your files, take Monday off.”

“Ted, you don’t have to-”

“-Nonsense.” Ted waves him off. “You do have to run the meeting today, I don’t know anything about that account. But I’ll hold things down here, you take the time you need. Take your work laptop home just in case we need you, but we can handle this.”

Eddie’s eyes burn with unshed tears, and he has to cover his eyes. Some of the tension he’s carried in his shoulders all morning dissipates, and he can breathe a little easier. “I’m leaving my card information with Maia, lunch is on me today, get whatever you guys want. I don’t want to see the bill.”

“Yea, better be on you, you should buy lunch for the whole office. Rich boyfriend and all that.” Ted teases, politely ignoring Eddie’s emotional state, “You know what this means though, don’t you?”

“What?”

“Now you really do have to bring him to the office christmas party.”

“Oh god please no.” Eddie groans, earning a laugh from Ted.

Richie stares at the cell phone sitting on the coffee table in front of him. He’s got both feet up on the table, leaning back, chewing aggressively on his fingernails (something Eddie’s gonna kill him for.)

It’d be so easy. Just open Twitter. Just answer one text message. Listen to one voicemail. All he has to do is turn it on. But his hands shake and he can’t even manage to do that much. Eddie is at work, Holly’s moping next to him. She hates the energy in the house and Richie’s almost worried it’s going to make her sick, but she’s with him anyway.

“C’mon, Tozier, you fucking pussy.” Richie says to himself, shooting forward and grabbing the phone. Eddie said he had cleared most of the notifications last night, but Richie knows the phone is going to blow up the moment it turns on.

Is he prepared for that? Can he actually say the words?

“Oh god, fuck you, honestly.” He says finally, throwing the phone onto the love seat across the room.

He turns Comedy Central on and talks shit about the jokes to Holly, who is incredibly entertained, and Bill, who is not, once he returns from the kitchen with (probably gourmet bullshit) grilled cheeses.

“What’s up, doc,” Richie greets Stewart from his lounging position on the couch. Stewart is standing next to him, dressed comfortably in his usual sweater and slacks get-up, not a wrinkle to be found within a five-mile radius of his body.

“Richie, you weren’t answering your phone.” Stewart says, pinching a soda can and moving it off of the coffee table to sit down. Bill takes the can, muttering something and running away into the kitchen.

“*Pussy* .” Richie hisses under his breath. He’s kind of glad Big Bill’s not sticking around for this one.

“How are you?” Stewart asks, crossing his legs and folding his hands on his lap. Holly sits up from Richie’s lap and leans over, panting at Stewart until he scratches her. Richie’s brought her by therapy before, they’re well acquainted.

“You know me, fuckin peachy.” Richie sits up in the corner of the couch. Stewart just stares at Richie until his skin crawls and he relents. “Fine, *fuck you*, I am clearly, not ‘okay’, is that what you want me to say?”

“I don’t want you do say anything in particular, I just prefer the truth.” He says and Richie rolls his eyes dramatically. If he had a nickel for every time he’s heard those words come from that man’s fucking mouth. “I just wanted to check up on you.”

“Well thanks, but as you can see, I already have a babysitter.” Richie

gestures towards wherever Bill ran off to.

“Do you need a ‘babysitter?’” Stewart asks.

“Probably.” Richie relents, looking away from him “I was drunk and high and stupid when Eddie came home yesterday, he’s probably pissed.”

“I bet he’s just concerned,” he says gently, “Why did you drink yesterday?”

“Oh I don’t know, probably because I was-” Richie cuts himself off, “Because I...because everyone knows now.”

“And you’re not comfortable with that?”

“No.” Richie crosses his arms.

“Richie.” He’s startled when Stewart scoots forward on the coffee table, setting a hand on Richie’s arm, “I am so sorry that happened to you. This is a very personal thing, and it’s violating to have the world know before you’re ready to tell them. It can be very traumatizing. I’m glad you have people here to be with you.”

Richie’s eyes burn a little, “Yea well...I’ve tried to push these people away for a few decades now, turns out it’s harder than it looks.”

“That’s good, Richie.” Stewart says, “I want you to call me if you need anything, okay? You have my number, no matter the time, you call and I’ll answer okay?”

“I’d have to turn my phone on for that first,” Richie mumbles, glaring over at where the phone is glaring at him from the love seat. Stewart looks over at it as well, eyebrows raised the way they always are when Richie baffles him.

“That is true. Maybe leaving that off will be best for a while.” Stewart says, staring at the phone. Richie looks at him. He knows he needs to turn the phone on, he has to address it, he has to read it but...but.

“Yea?” He ventures and Stewart looks back at him with a kind face.

“Of course. You need to take care of you. All of that? None of it matters. If it’s bad for you, you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. It’s okay to put yourself before your work. You need to take care of Richie before you can take care of anyone else.”

Stewart is so rough with him sometimes, point-blank in his observances, cutting Richie’s shit quickly, not engaging with Richie’s artful deflections. But god he can be so nice. Richie’s eyes well up.

“I’m going to leave my number with your babysitter. You can call me from his phone, or Eddie has my number as well. Whenever you need me, it’s okay to reach out. Or, let your friends be here for you, they love you too.” Richie nods as Stewart stands up, “I would like to hug you. Would you prefer a handshake?”

Richie stands up and lets Stewart lean forward and hug Richie. Richie returns it, fisting the man’s sweater in his hands for a moment before pulling back. Richie smiles, knowing Stewart won’t know the back of his sweater is now a wrinkled mess. He pats the side of Richie’s face, scratches Holly’s head, and then says goodbye. He can hear him talking to Bill before he leaves, but Richie’s preoccupied with the phone sitting on the couch.

He doesn’t have to do anything he doesn’t want to.

He grabs the phone.

“Bill?” He walks into the foyer, and sees Bill at the door, locking it behind Stewart.

“Yea, Rich?”

“I need you to hide this somewhere in the house and not tell me where it is.” Bill takes the phone gingerly, looking at Richie wearily. “Just like, tell Eddie where you put it. I don’t want to have to tear this house apart when I finally...when I want it again.”

“Okay.” Bill smiles, patting Richie’s bicep with his free hand. “Want to watch Back to the Future?”

“Fuck yea.”

When Eddie makes it home, the house is relatively quiet. He follows the sound of movies into the living room where Richie is dozing on the couch with Holly. He rounds the corner to make sure Richie's actually asleep, and then turns the TV off. He finds Bill sitting in the dining room, laptop out in front of him.

"Hey." Eddie greets him, setting his own laptop bag down on the table, and unbuttoning his blazer.

"Hey, Ed." Bill greets, not looking up from whatever he's typing away at.

"What are you writing?" Eddie asks casually, walking off towards the kitchen to grab two glasses of water for them.

"Eh, It's the book I started last year." Bill brushes him off.

"Anything interesting?"

"Uh, I'm not sure." Bill says, sitting back from his laptop for a moment to look up at Eddie, who was sitting down next to him at the table. "I feel good about it though."

"That's great." Eddie smiles tightly, "You'll have to let us read it."

"Yea," he starts, looking at Eddie curiously. "He was fine today, by the way."

Eddie, who had been looking over his shoulder in the direction of the living room twists back around. Chuckling humorlessly at being caught, he runs a hand over his face.

"Yea, I'm transparent, I don't even care. Today fucking sucked." Eddie grabs his glass of water, spinning the liquid around a bit. "I really want a drink right now."

"You and me both." Bill agrees, leaning back and crossing his arms

over his chest. "He'll be okay, Ed. Honestly, he's handling this remarkably well for Richie."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know man, last time he was like this he tried to kill himself and then he got a dog so at least he's just like...sleeping a lot?"

"The OD is debatable." Eddie shrugs, smiling a little bit at the running gag between Bill and Richie, who maintains that Bill overreacted. "Do you think it's kind of fucked up we joke about that stuff?"

"Eddie, we beat the shit out of an evil killer clown-god before we hit puberty and he murdered my brother. At this point, if we don't laugh we'll lose our damn minds." Bill smirked, and Eddie chuckled along with him.

"You can head home if you want." Eddie says once the silence between them settles. "I have off work until he's better so you shouldn't have to like, come over and babysit or whatever."

"I wanted to be here, Ed." Bill says seriously. "It's not a chore. I love him too."

"No, no I know I..." Eddie sighed, "Sorry, I didn't mean--"

"You're fine." Bill interrupts, sitting forward and laying a hand on Eddie's forearm, "I love you both, you know? I know you think you have to be strong for him right now but if there's anything you need--"

"I'll be fine, Bill." Eddie smiles, patting the other man's hand where it rests on his arm. "Thank you."

"Of course." Bill smiles. They both look up when they see motion from the direction of the living room, but it's just Holly trotting into the room to lay on the cool kitchen floor. "I wish there was more we could do for him."

"Me too." Eddie takes a drink of his water. "He's always been the suffer in silence type though, at least that never changed."

“Yea,” Bill laughs, “Remember when he broke his toe and just like, never told anybody?”

“Yea.” Eddie scoots forward in his seat towards Bill, “and we only figured it out because he took his shoes off at the quarry and his toe was fucking purple.”

They both break to laugh at the memory, Eddie trying to stifle his smile in his palm as he looks fondly down at the table. Bill leans back in his chair and looks at Eddie for a moment.

“Maybe we should get out of here for the weekend.” Bill says gently.

“What?”

“I was talking to Stan earlier. We were thinking about getting Richie out of LA for the weekend, maybe taking a trip somewhere.” Bill looks up a little weary, clearly knowing Eddie’s already on edge at the suggestion. “Okay, hear me out. Staying hidden up in the house isn’t going to do him any favors, and he can’t really go anywhere around town until this dies down.” When Eddie just looks at him with a furrowed brow and a disbelieving look, Bill hurries to add on, “Besides, everyone wants to see you both. They haven’t seen you since the attack anyway. Ben and Bev worry, you know.”

Eddie sits back in his chair, crossing one leg over the other and his arms across his chest. He purses his lips as he mulls the suggestion over in his mouth.

“I’ll think about it.”

“Really?” Bill’s voice is disbelieving and he raises his eyebrows. “Not that I’m complaining, I just thought it’d be a harder sell.”

“I’m not naive enough to think I’m enough for him.” Eddie says quietly, glancing back towards the living room. “Maybe it will be good for him to see everyone.”

“Ed--” Bill starts, but Eddie waves him off. “Okay, well, just let me know, okay? You know how Stan refuses to let anyone else plan these things anyway, he’ll do all the work.”

Waking Richie later is...difficult to say the least. Eddie threw a simple dinner together after Bill left, and Richie slept through the whole thing, even Eddie playing the most recent game on his tablet as he cooked.

Eddie tries to shake Richie awake gently, crouching down next to him (despite the crack in his knees.) When that doesn't work, he tries taking the blanket off, tries turning the living room lights on and still he doesn't wake when Eddie shakes him.

"C'mon dude," Eddie groans, shoving at Richie's shoulder harshly once. When that doesn't work Eddie resorts to clapping close to his face. Richie groggily shoves Eddie's hands away from and rolls onto his back with a low groan, stretching his arms above his head.

"Where's my blanket?" He asks, cracking open his eyes.

"I took it."

"Meanie." Richie looks at Eddie, smiling lazily for just a moment before realization dawns on his features. He looks around the room, noting the setting sun outside of the bay windows. "Shit, what time is it?"

"Dinner time." Eddie says simply, rising from his seat on the coffee table and grabbing for Richie's hands, trying to pull him up to his feet. Richie groans and throws his weight back, deliberately **not helping**. "For fuck's sake, Rich. C'mon."

"Hey. I just want to go back to sleep, okay?" Richie says seriously.

"I do too, but Bill said you didn't eat much at lunch, and you need to get something in your stomach, stay hydrated."

"Eddie, seriously, I don't want to." Richie tone drops its' teasing quality. Eddie gives one more half-hearted tug on Richie wrists.

“You gotta eat dude.”

“Eddie, please. Stop.” Richie wiggles his wrists from Eddie’s grip, grabbing the throw pillow and stuffing it under his head.

“Richie I’m serious.”

“So am I.” Richie mutters back, face pressed into the pillow.

Eddie, feeling that stream of anger he’s tried to push down bubbling up again, rips the throw pillow from Richie, causing his head to fall against the cushion of the couch.

“Eddie, just fucking leave it alone.” Richie snaps, sitting up straight on the couch.

The words feel like a slap to the face, one that would have him stumbling back with its’ force. Hurt swells in his chest but the anger rises to meet it, drowning out the hurt with its’ force. He purses his lips and throws the pillow back at Richie harshly, hitting him in the back of the head.

“Fine.” He says simply, turning on his heel and walking out of the living room. Richie says nothing as he leaves, and Eddie can’t tell if it hurts or just makes him more upset. He hears the TV turned back on, and stands in the kitchen, contemplating boxing up the plate he made for Richie; He contemplates putting it in its’ proper containers, finding the right lids in the drawer, where he’d put it in the fridge. Eddie grabs it and empties it into the trash, tossing the still-dirty plate into the sink.

He doesn’t *try* and stomp up the stairs (except he still does), doesn’t *try* to slam the bedroom door behind him (except he still does.) He grabs some sleep clothes from their conjoined closet and shuts himself in the bathroom. He throws his clothes harshly in the direction of the hamper and switches the shower onto the hottest setting, standing beneath the head as the water journeys from freezing to scalding.

Eddie leans his head against the tile, watching the rivets of water trail down his own chest, leaving the skin beneath it flushed. The

cold stings at first, and he tries to let it calm him, but his fingers still shake where they're pressed against the tile. He doesn't know what else to do with the energy in his body so he slams his fist against the tile with a shout. The pain shooting down his arm almost feels good, feels grounding. It's something to focus his attention on as the anger slowly seeps from his muscles, leaving behind only an aching kind of hurt.

His hand is sore. He exhales shakily and closes his eyes. If tears fall, nobody would be able to tell with the water streaming down his face. He tries to calm his breathing, but his chest is heaving and his breath catches in his throat with every inhale.

The hand on his shoulder makes him jump, but he's already fuking trembling. He leans his head against the tile again, failing to regulate his breathing. Richie's chin settles on his shoulder, his hands sliding over his shoulders, rubbing soothing circles into his triceps. Richie presses his mouth along the curve of his shoulder and Eddie squeezes his eyes shut at the sensation.

He wants to be mad. He wants to be so fucking mad. But god, he knows he's not good at this. He tries to force Richie into behavior that would make *him* feel better because he feels so fucking powerless to fix things. He's...he's fucking trying. They're both trying so fucking hard, they've **been** trying, but sometimes it's just not enough.

"M sorry." Richie says quietly against his skin and Eddie hangs his head for a moment before turning in him grip. Richie brings a hand up to brush wet hair off of Eddie's forehead, and Eddie tries to clear the water in his eyes by blinking it away. He looks up at Richie, at the stricken look on his face, the drops of water clinging to his lashes, falling down the round curve of his nose.

Eddie lifts himself onto his toes, wrapping his arms up over Richie's shoulders. He grabs at his shoulder with sore fingers, clutching Richie's hair in the other hand, pulling him down into the crook of his neck. Eddie wishes he could just fucking make everything better. He wishes they could wind back time to the summer, when things were still fun and exciting; When every touch was electric and smiles felt free and every kiss, every movement together was *new* and only *theirs*.

He just wants everything to be okay again.

“I’m so sorry.” He says into Richie’s hair, holding himself up on his toes as Richie’s arms tighten around his waist. What is he sorry for? For trying? For Richie being outed? For being the reason he got outed? He doesn’t even know anymore, but he does know Richie understands.

He doesn’t hear Richie cry, but he feels the tremors of his body, his chest bursting with sobs against Eddie’s. Eddie holds him tighter, pressing a hard kiss to the side of his head, muttering some unknown litany of platitudes, voice soft as the water cools and his legs tremble from holding his position.

Later, when he’s lying in bed behind Richie, legs cradled together, he rolls over to plug his phone in. Before he locks it for the night, he shoots a text off to Bill.

Bill Denbrough

Okay

Notes for the Chapter:

TW: Mentions of Suicide, An Overdose?, Recreational Drug Use, Substance Abuse, VERY unhealthy coping mechanisms, Richie gets forcibly outed by the media, Society's conditioning of men so they're unable to emote until they explode.

I know. I lured you into a false sense of security with

the Holly picture, then smacked you in the face with 8k of angst.

Uh, yea...Richie's turn to break down and Eddie is...trying his best. I don't want Richie's behavior to come across as mean, so if anyone is questioning kind of the lashing out he does, here's how I view it: He's been alone for so long. Like, I imagine his life was just a revolving door of strangers in an attempt to recapture the sense of belonging he had with the losers as a kid. In the book he has a lot of expensive things and what I take from that is that he's tried to fill that void with material things and it doesn't work. Kind of a "What do you get for the man that has everything?" delima for our boy. He desperately wants to just be with other people, but he doesn't really remember how. He loves to help other people but doesn't understand how to ask for help, and Eddie's not the best at reading the room. Even if you love someone wholeheartedly, you can't make that person reach out when they need someone.

In other news, if anyone wants to see what Richie's house looks like, here is

[Richie's Beach House](#)

Anyway, novel over. I hope you all enjoyed the chapter! Your comments on the last chapter were so inspiring, I absolutely love hearing your guys' take on what happens and how they react. <3

7. Lend me your eyes I can change what you see



Richie Tozier seen at LAX this morning with a “friend” and his dog.

"This is the worst coming out party ever." Richie says, tossing his duffle bag into the foyer and letting the door swing closed behind him.

"For fuck's sake, Rich." Mike grunts, shouldering the door open and lugging multiple suitcases in behind him. Richie steps to the side to let Mike pass, rubbing his arms against the cold air.

"Thanks for bringing my stuff in, Mikey!" He says pleasantly, smiling at the glare Mike levels over his shoulder.

"You're a dickhead," Eddie says, walking in behind Mike and shoving Holly's diaper bag into Richie's chest. "You could have brought your own bags in."

"Hey, I'm depressed, Stewart says you have to be nice to me." Richie pouts at Eddie, ruffling the snow from his hair. Eddie rolls his eyes and shoves at Richie.

"Welcome to the club, asshole." Bev says from across the cabin.

"Bevvv." Richie says sweetly following her voice into the sitting area where Ben and she are already snug on the couch in front of the fire. It's always like this, not realizing how deep the longing runs for all of them until he sees Ben's dimples or the shock of Bev's red hair, Stan's curls or Mike's kind eyes. Richie walks over to them and drapes himself across Ben's lap to put his head on Bev's. "Hello dears, you're both looking handsome as ever."

"Incoming!" Bill shouts from outside. Richie braces himself in anticipation when he hears the scratching of claws on the floor, but it still takes the breath out of his lungs when Holly jumps up onto his stomach to lick at Ben.

"Hey sweetie." Ben scratches under her chin with a baby voice, before she moves onto Bev, walking over Richie's entire body to get there. He sputters and shoves her over his head to sit on the other side of Bev.

"How is my favorite girl?" Bev asks, letting Holly jump up and lick her face, rubbing their heads together.

"Holly, baby, I'm your daddy, you're supposed to love *me* ." Richie reaches up to scratch at her. She licks him absentmindedly but turns back, presenting her neck for Bev to continue scratching her.

"Please, never call yourself 'Daddy' when you're in my lap, Rich." Ben says with a grimace.

"Do you want to be my Daddy instead Ben? Is that what gets you going?" Richie smirks, shaking his torso back and forth across Ben's lap. "C'mon, fist me Daddy." Ben flushes bright red and shoves Richie off of him, onto the floor. Bev fucking cackles at him, and he's laughing too as he pushes himself up off of the ground. However, Holly sees this and decides Richie wants to wrestle and pounces on his back, forcing him back down to the ground with a thud.

"You're killin' me smalls." Richie groans, dislodging Holly who is still trying to play.

"C'mere, girl." Mike says and Holly runs over to join him, crawling into his lap in the recliner he's in.

"That was mean Haystack, I'm injured. I know you're not on the internet, did that not make it into the papers, you old fucking man?" Richie slaps Ben's knee half heartedly, but Ben just gives him a deadpan look, face still flushed.

"Don't be a brat, you're fine." Eddie walks into the room, sitting on the loveseat closest to Richie and kicking his feet up to rest on Richie's shoulders where he's still sitting on the ground. Richie relents, sitting back against the loveseat and dragging Eddie's legs over his shoulders instead. He wraps his fingers around the thin tendon in Eddie's ankle.

"My heart is wounded, Eds. Kiss it better?" Richie tilts his head back, trying to look at Eddie upside down. Eddie rolls his eyes and nudges Richie with one of his knees. Richie grabs Eddie's leg in retaliation, trying to blow a raspberry into his inner thigh over his pants.

“Rich, stop!” Eddie shouts, shooting forward and grabbing Richie’s head by the hair, tugging him off.

“I’m sure this is like, kinky for you two, but I’m fucking starving.” Stan walks in from the kitchen with a glass in hand. Eddie eyes the glass wearily. The number one stipulation for the weekend? No alcohol. Not this time. None of them need to indulge, least of all Richie.

It was the other losers’ idea to take a trip this weekend, get Richie’s mind off of it. (All fun and games until Eddie had to coordinate plane tickets and arguing with flight attendants about Holly’s ESA certification.) It could almost be considered pathetic how many hoops Eddie would willingly jump through for all of them.

It’s been a few months since they all saw each other, and that was the group summer vacation, that Audra, Patty, and Sarah (Mike’s girlfriend) all attended. This, however, was a losers only trip.

Ben and Eddie drove into town to get some groceries, while the others wanted to check out the yard. There’s a few inches of snow on the ground (Aspen in the late fall) and Holly darts off across the yard, leaving long streaks in the snow. They all jog after her, throwing one of her frisbees back and forth between them. Richie plays with them for a while before his old body gets achy from the cold and he retires to the porch with Stan instead.

Stan wraps an arm around Richie’s shoulders under the pretense of sharing his blanket. Stan doesn’t ask him how he is. He knows better than to make Richie put these things into words. Stan’s not one for talking, not really, but Richie gets it. He gets it when he sees the sad turn of Stan’s eyes, the worried crease in his brow, the downward turn of his mouth.

Richie tries to smile at him, but they both know it’s a thinly veiled mask that Richie’s too tired to keep up. Stan smiles back. He understands. Stan has always understood Richie in a jarringly intimate way.

“I love you, Rich.” Stan says simply, pressing his forehead to the side of Richie’s head. Richie nods, grabbing the hand on his shoulder and

squeezing. *'When people reach out for you, try not to push them away'* Stewart's voice reminds him of the one thing they've been working on since the beginning. Richie closes his eyes, pressing his head against Stan's and letting himself breathe in the moment.

Eventually, Stan untangles himself, but leaves half the blanket around Richie. He brings his hands back to the coffee mug in his lap, fingers wrapped tight around the steaming liquid. His sleeves of his sweater are pushed up to his elbows and Richie can see the scars there.

They're stark white against his tanned skin, trailing from his inner elbow down to the thin flesh of his wrist. When Stan showed up in Derry, arms wrapped tight with bandages, he didn't show them off. It wasn't until after all of it when they were in the hospital for Eddie and Richie's stitches and Mike's broken arm, that Stan politely asked a nurse to look at his wounds. He was worried they were infected. Richie caught sight of them and threw up.

He grabs Stan's right hand, turning it over so he can rub a thumb along the raised flesh. It'll never be normal, to see these on Stan's arms. It'll always punch him in the gut, take the breath from his lungs. "I love you too, man." Richie says, eyes trained on the raised white scar, brushing his thumb over the thing that almost took Stan from him.

Richie doesn't want to think about what would have happened if Stan succeeded that night.

"Here, drink some water, babe." Bev says, taking the bowl from Ben and shoving her glass into his hands. He hacks into his elbow a few times and chugs the water.

"Don't be a pussy, Ben." Richie says, kicking out at Ben's foot. They're all sitting on the back porch, fireplace lit between them and blankets keeping out the cold.

“You are what you eat.” Stan says. Bev chokes on the hit and Ben high-fives Stan across the circle. Everyone’s laughing.

“Jesus Christ, Mikey.” Eddie says as Mike takes a huge hit, blowing the smoke out slowly through his nostrils.

“I’m not even surprised, Mike knows all about doing drugs.” Bill, ever the lightweight, already sounds high.

“What the fuck does that mean?” Mike gives Bill a betrayed look.

“Dude, you fucking roofied me, did you forget that?” Bill puts a hand on Mike’s knee, seeming genuinely concerned that Mike may have forgotten. Mike scoffs, pushing him back with his palm to Bill’s forehead.

“Don’t be a baby, Bill. It was a little hallucinogenic root, it wasn’t going to kill you.”

“I was still high, like, the next day.”

“Not his fault you’re a lightweight.” Bev shrugs.

“Is weed Kosher?” Richie asks out loud, looking at Stan with a dumb grin on his face. Stan takes the bowl from Mike and looks at it for a moment before shrugging. “I don’t fucking know.”

“Attaboy.” Richie pats Stan’s back when he chokes a little on the smoke.

“Wanna shotgun, babe?” Richie teases Eddie, raising his eyebrows suggestively. Eddie gives a disgusted scoff.

“No Richie, I don’t want you blowing second-hand fucking smoke into my lungs. Fuck you very much.”

“If you insist.”

Eddie shoves Richie to the side. Prior to moving to LA, Eddie hadn’t smoked weed since college. But it was legal in California, it calmed Richie down sometimes, and sometimes drinking was out of the question, so it worked. Riche high on weed was just normal Richie

dialed up to ten but Eddie high on weed? Richie loved it, even if Eddie always felt a little embarrassed in the mornings.

They smoked for a bit with Richie playing his Losers Club 'Mixtape' from his phone. Bev and Ben held the bowl between them as they serenaded each other with some shitty New Kids on the Block song until Stan had enough and forcibly skipped over to a Billy Joel song.

Once they're done, and the playlist dwindles into Foreigner, Bev, Richie, and Bill all stumble over each other in their rush to get to the kitchen.

"I knew letting Eddie and Ben grocery shop was a mistake." Richie groans, frowning at the vegetables and raw meat in the fridge. Bev manages to get her hands on a bag of Chex-Mix.

"Babe." She says, kissing Ben way too deep to be in front of their friends, "thank you so much, you know these are my favorite, god you're the best."

"I think I just saw tongue." Eddie recoils a bit away from them. He's sitting up on the kitchen island, and pulls Richie back between his legs so he can wrap his arms around Richie's shoulders, his legs going around Richie's middle.

"Is it wrong if it's kinda hot." Richie asks with a lazy smile. Eddie giggles.

"I'll show you hot."

"Oh yea?"

Eddie grabs a fistfull of Richie's hair and pulls his head back, leaning down for a kiss. He kisses him thoroughly, opening his mouth with a thumb in the hollow of his cheek, pressing hard against his mouth. There's a fake retching sound from Stan, and the boys break apart with another giggle.

"I see anyone's dick and I am on the first plane back to Georgia." Stan says, finding a bag of chips in the cabinet.

"I also don't want to see anyone's dick." Bill raises his hand, spitting

the words around a mouth full of Bev's chex mix.

"Don't worry." Richie wipes the back of his mouth, "My dick only has eyes for Eddie. And/Or Ben."

"What? Why me?" Ben asks, looking confused.

"Honey." Bev swats his chest with the back of her hand.

"Yea, you're hot." Mike says, trying to grab some chips from Stan.

"Rich, if your dick has eyes we really need to take you to the doctor." Eddie says, genuinely concerned.

"Don't worry babe, you can give me a full exam later."

"That's probably a good idea," Eddie nods along, "Do you think there's an article on WebMD for that? If not, we need to document your symptoms so we can submit it, I've done it before, the process is very easy."

"Dude didn't you like, write WebMD? Do you have stock in WebMD?" Bill asks, eyes red and distant.

They end up ordering way too much food from some local pizza place and tipping the delivery driver (who glares at a stoned Richie knowingly) \$20 for the trouble. All in all, it's a good night. It's a really good night. They all cuddle on the living room couches and watch the Great British Bakeoff.

When he comes out of his high late into the evening, Richie feels a certain level of content he so rarely gets to experience. Stan is pressed up to his left side, Eddie clinging to his right, and Bev's hand is dangling in his hair. The love he has for all of them, every single one of them, is so utterly overwhelming he has to shut it out half the time. He'll blame it on the weed later, on his utter inability to maintain any facade when he's high, but god dammit chest *aches* with how much he loves all of them, and how much they love him too.

It's Bill dropping everything to come babysit Richie, it's Bev's utter concern and Ben's kind understanding eyes. It's the matching scars

him and Eddie have on their arms from Pennywise. Stan showing up in Derry with bandaged arms and a determined look, And Mike? Mike who stayed in Derry, kept a watch on everything, living for them for 27 years even though they didn't remember him. The utter selflessness of all of it is astonishing.

They're all here this weekend for him. Because they *love* him.

It makes everything else seem inconsequential.

Richie lounges on the back porch early in the morning, watching the sun rise over the snow-capped horizon. Holly is with him, keeping half of his body warm where she lays across him.

He holds his phone in his right hand and stares at the thing. It's stupid to be afraid of it. It's stupid to be afraid of what everyone is going to say because, at the end of the day, he doesn't care about anything they have to say.

Those assholes that jumped him? What do they know? They'll never know love like he feels for the Losers. Love that was strong enough to crush the beating heart of the evil god. Love strong enough to pull them back together like magnets after 27 years. Love strong enough to bring out the best in all of them.

They'll never know anything like that.

Nobody will ever understand why this rag tag group of strangers are his family. He can't imagine a world where any of them don't love each other. It's incomprehensible.

Richie turns his phone on.

Notifications spill across the screen and he has to set the phone down on his stomach for a minute to let all of them pop up. The lock screen seems to scroll endlessly for a few minutes.

“Hey stranger,” Bev says, coming over and sliding into the space between Richie’s body and the arm of the lounge chair, throwing a blanket over them both. Holly huffs at being disturbed, adjusting herself where she’s lounging between Richie’s legs, her head on his hip under the blanket.

“Hey, Bevvv.” Richie wraps his arm around her shoulders, pulling her to lay against his chest. They relax there for a bit, watching the sun glimmer across the crystalline layer of snow on the horizon, Holly’s heavy breathing between them. The world is still. Richie closes his eyes.

“I’ve been so worried about you.” she says gently, disturbing the peaceful quiet between them. Her head is on his shoulder, one hand fisted in the t-shirt across his chest.

“I’m sorry.”

“No,” she pats his chest, “Don’t be sorry. It’s not your fault.”

Bev tilts her head back to look up at him. She’s got bags beneath her eyes, but she’s less thin. Her frame has filled out, she’s soft instead of bony and brittle, and her skin is tanned and unmarred. Richie kisses her forehead.

“It’s certainly been a shitty month.” he mutters against her hairline. Bev chuckles.

“How have you been? I should have come to see you before this.”

“Bev, you’re fine.” Richie says, grabbing her hand that’s on his chest, and rubbing back and forth across her fingers, “We just started to get better after everything with those guys. Things were really hard for Eddie there for the first couple weeks, but we were getting there.”

“And you?” He pulls his head back to look at her, “How did you handle everything?”

“You know me, Marsh. Took it like a champ.” Richie tries to smile, but Bev gives him a dry look.

“Before this week? I don’t know. Fine, I guess.” He relents, “Those

guys they just...they don't mean anything. Once I healed, it didn't bother me very much. They were shitheads, and it made my nightmares worse. But uh, yea it wasn't until this week that things got dicey."

"Bill said it was pretty rough." Bev runs the tips of her fingers across Richie's stubble.

"Yea, but hey, Bill didn't shove his fingers down my throat this time, so we've certainly been through worse." Richie grins, softening at the fond look in Bev's eyes. "I'm glad you guys planned this." Richie kisses her fingers, looking down at her smiling face, "I miss you guys so much, like, all the time. It's kind of gross."

"I know," She smiles at the joke, but her voice turns hard, her eyes determined. "We all wanted to see you so bad, Rich. I just...I want you to know how much we love you."

"I do." He nods, "You guys are...you're everything to me. All of you. Just because Eddie lets me put my dick in his ass doesn't mean I love him more than you guys."

Bev laughs loudly, pressing her face into Richie's shoulder to smother the sound. She pulls back with a pinched brow, "Really?"

"What?"

"You expect me to believe Eddie's the bottom?"

"Beverly Marsh!" Richie gasps loudly, "get those filthy words out of your mouth." Bev laughs more. "How regressive of you Marsh, I'll have you know this is an equal opportunity household."

"Okay." Bev pats his chest lightly, "Whatever you say, babe."

Richie gapes at her and pinches her side, making her giggle.

"That's homophobic, Bev. Do you want to hear all about how if I twist my fingers just right I can make Eddie come-"

"No!" She slaps a hand over his mouth, laughing. "That is the last thing I want to hear about. Besides, wasn't homophobic like, your

brand at one point?” Bev scoffs.

“Well yes, but that was 2003. Times have changed. Where once I was a young boy trapped in the closet, screaming into the void about how straight I was, now I am, as Twitter would say, a ‘gay icon.’ Move over Babadook.”

“Are you okay with that?” Bev ventures carefully.

“With what?”

“Being a ‘gay icon’.”

Richie’s smile falls and he grabs his phone from his stomach. The notifications have stopped. He hits the clear all button, and they disappear, leaving only the photo from summer vacation of Bev and Eddie tying a handkerchief around Holly’s neck.

“I don’t think I really have a choice.”

“What are you going to do?” She asks.

“I’ll do what I do best. Wing it.”

“You’ll have fun’, he says,” Richie mutters to himself bent in half, hands on his knees and panting.

“Come on, man, this is literally the shortest hiking trail I could find.” Mike turns to Richie with his hands on his hips.

“Okay, but what about *this*,” Richie gestures to his body, “makes you think I want to go for a fucking hike.” Richie groans loudly, and Holly barks along with him. “I’m an old man, have mercy.”

“Richie, we’re all the same age, and you’re barely 40.” Ben scoffs, unclipping his water bottle and handing it to Richie.

“Look,” Richie takes a large swig of water, “I’m the normal one. It’s not my fault you two decided to get all fit instead of just becoming an alcoholic like the rest of us.”

“Hey,” Ben snatched his bottle back and pointed the top at Richie, “I can be an alcoholic *and* exercise and eat right.”

“Yea, bold of you to think I’m **not** an alcoholic.” Mike scoffs, “I was stranded in fucking Derry for thirty years by myself, you really think I was sober that whole time.”

“Ugh, quit coming for my brand. Alcoholism is my thing.” Richie waves them off, starting off down the path again with a groan.

The hike was actually pretty nice once Richie looked past the burning in his legs and his lungs. Holly certainly enjoyed running circles around them as they huffed and puffed their way up the mountain. It was a short path, just to get to a nice outcrop on the cliff face. Richie had absolutely no intention of joining them, but Eddie practically threw him out of the house with Ben and Mike.

They did have to stop a couple times for Richie, let him catch his breath, shake off the burning in his legs, but to his credit, Richie continued up the path. Mike got behind him a couple times and kept a hand on his back to make sure he wouldn’t fall backwards down the incline. The snow made it a little harder to travel up, it made Richies toes freeze inside his boots and his fingers tingle, but didn’t complain too much.

In the end, it was worth it.

When they finally reached the summit of the path, Richie let out a loud exhausted groan.

“Thank fuck.” He said, dusting off the ground in front of the fencing and sitting down, kicking his legs over the side of the cliff.

“Hey, Rich, maybe that’s not safe.” Ben’s voice was laden with concern, and that particular tone was slowly losing its effect with Richie. He lived with Eddie, afterall.

“Haystack, shut up and join me.” Richie put his arms through the

lower ring of the fence. Holly came up next to him, laying down on the ground and panting.

“Fuck it, c’mon Ben. Live a little.” Mike sat down next to Richie, stroking down Holly’s flank. Ben, reluctantly, came to sit next to them. He pushed on the fencing a bit to test its sturdiness (well, lack thereof.)

It was mid-afternoon, the sun was shining bright on the snow capped mountains, drifting across the treeline, illuminating the city in the distance. Richie usually wasn’t into shit like this, but it was certainly beautiful. Mike pulled a large camera out of his bag, and unscrewed the cap over the lens. He played with the settings a bit, and snapped a dozen pictures of the horizon.

Before Richie realized what he was doing, Mike turned the camera and snapped a picture of Richie, Holly, and Ben watching the horizon.

“Michael, please, I don’t do selfies.” Richie snipped.

“Oh it’s a good one, look.” Mike handed the camera over to Richie. It was a cute photo. The sun cast them all in a flattering yellow glow and you can see the treeline in the background. Richie leaned over to show Ben, who smiled sweetly at the image.

“Email that one to me.” Ben said. “Do you want me to take your picture?”

“Yes!”

Richie stood off to the side as Ben helped Mike pose for a photo. Ben went so far as to crouch down and tilt the lens to get a good angle on it. Richie pulled his phone out and snapped a photo of the two of them. He sent it to the Losers snapchat group, saved it, and then put his phone away again.

Richie grabbed Ben’s water bottle and poured a bit of it out into Holly’s mouth.

“Sorry, baby, I forgot your bowl.” Richie petted down her neck, but she didn’t care about anything other than the water in her mouth.

“Oh boys,” Richie said, slinging an arm around both of their shoulders and looking out at the horizon, “I love you both, but please never make me go for a hike again.”

“But you were so fun to bring along, we’d be lost without you.” Mike deadpanned. Riche punched his arm, probably hurting himself more in the process than he would have hurt Mike.

“Jesus Christ, you two are made of fucking steel, I swear.”

“I fucking hate you, you stupid fucking piece of shit.” Eddie slams his hand down on the table, rattling all of the pieces on the board.

“Fucking calm down,” Stan huffs, “don’t be such a baby.”

“Shut the fuck up, Stan.” Eddie says with a huff, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Awe, Baby Eddie want some juice?” Mike teases setting a glass of fruit punch down in front of Eddie.

“I fucking hate you guys.” Eddie mutters. Richie reaches over and sets his hand over the back of Eddie’s neck, rubbing a thumb along the short strands along his hairline. He feels ten years old again, watching with fascination as studios little Eddie screamed out some girl for cheating at dodgeball in P.E.. He always loved the way Eddie got like this, when he got angry and flustered and pink; He always seemed so much more alive.

“It’s okay Eds, I still love you.” Richie presses a kiss to Eddie’s cheek. Eddie, still glaring, looks at Richie out of the corner of his eye and his body relaxes just a little.

“This is why we stopped playing Monopoly.” Bev says, picking up the dice, “you’re all such sore losers.”

“Oh yea, big talk for a girl that ripped the fucking game board in half

once.” Bill scoffs. Bev lands on one of Stan’s properties and reluctantly hands over her money.

“That was not my fault, right Ben?” Bev turns in her seat to shout at Ben, who is standing over the stove, nodding along to the faint music playing.

“What?” Ben asks, setting the spatula down and walking over.

“Bev’s trying to say it wasn’t her fault when she tore my Monopoly board in half that one time when we were kids. When in fact, I’m pretty sure that’s why we stopped playing Monopoly in the first place.” Richie sits back, one arm still slung over the back of Eddie’s chair. Ben looks back and forth between Bev and Richie, and then decides to just stare at his feet. “Oh ho! What is this coy look for, Benjamin?”

“Well,” Ben starts with a grimace. “Bev, I mean, you went bankrupt and then broke Richie’s game board, I don’t see how--”

“It wasn’t. My. Fault.” Bev grabs Ben’s sleeve, leveling a hard look up at him. Ben smiles nervously.

“You’re right, Hun. What was I thinking?” Bev pulls Ben down for a chaste kiss, swatting his ass as he turns to go back to the kitchen and finish dinner.

“Get your cute hetero romance out of here.” Eddie throws a teasing glare at Bev, settling back into Richie’s arm.

Richie keeps Stan and Eddie from murdering each other, and Bill keeps Stan and Bev apart while Ben finishes dinner. There is a minor scuffle between Eddie and Bev, but Mike leaves Ben in the kitchen to act as a buffer between them.

“You’re so cute when you’re pissed off.” Richie says close into Eddie’s ear as Bill and Mike clean up the board. Eddie turns his head, but he’s still pouting and Richie finds it’s ridiculously endearing. Eddie presses a hard kiss to Richie’s mouth. Richie smiles, kissing along the sharp line of Eddie’s cheekbone and grabbing Eddie’s hands, undoing his crossed arms and twining their fingers together.

"You're both cute, now can we please eat dinner?" Stan groans. Richie reaches out to kick him under the table. The two wrestle with their feet for a minute before Ben and Bev bring over their dinner.

"Ben this smells so fucking good I could kiss you." Richie says, moaning loudly.

"Gross Rich, nobody needs to hear that," Bill's face is screwed up into a disgusted look at Richie's moan.

"Eddie's Mom certainly wasn't complaining last night." Richie leans forward on the table, smirking, but Eddie shoves Richie so hard he falls out of his chair. Richie looks up offended from the floor, "Eds, don't act like that! I know for a fact you get off on—"

"Shut the fuck up, Trashmouth!" Eddie slams his hands over Richie's mouth, face red and angry while the other Losers laugh. Richie licks Eddie's palms and, predictably, Eddie snatches his hands back. He mutters angrily under his breath and goes over to the sink to wash his hands.

"Why does that gross you out? You've had your tongue in his mouth. I've seen it." Bill asks.

"We all have." Mike ads on, taking a sip of his water.

"Not the only place his tongue has been." Bev mutters into the rim of her cup.

"Because fuck you, that's why."

"I do agree, it's very different." Stan tips his glass to Eddie.

"Thank you, Stan." Eddie and Stan share a smile as Eddie returns to the table.

"Awe, are my boys getting along again?" Richie, back in his seat, wraps an arm around both of them.

"Fuck off." Eddie and Stan say simultaneously, both hitting Richie's chest.

Richie woke up early Sunday morning with his heart racing, his hands shaking, and an empty bed. He splashed water on his face, rubbed the tear tracks from his cheeks, and grabbed a blanket off of the bed.

He went onto the back porch for some air, but Eddie seemed to have had the same idea. He was out there, clad in a soft sweater and lying on a lounge chair with Holly next to him.

It was so simple, Richie's seen him sleep a dozen times, but something about this moment was so tender to him. The sun was just coming up over the mountains, casting a warm golden light over half of Eddie's face, illuminating the tanned skin and bringing out the brown in his hair.

Richie took a photo on his phone.

"Hey, sleeping beauty." Richie sat on the edge of the lounge chair, brushing a strand of hair off of Eddie's forehead. Eddie's eyes opened slowly, and his eyes focused even slower. Eddie was always so high strung, Richie loved these moments right after waking or when he was very tired where he was lethargic. Where the always pinched expression softened, his worried eyes were little more than lazily focusing. Richie pressed a soft kiss to the top of Eddie's cheekbone, running his fingertips back through his hair.

"Hey." Eddie breathed into that quiet space between them, face softening in every corner. Richie stroked along the jut of his cheekbone, leaning forward against him.

"What are you doing out here?"

"Holly woke me up to piss." Eddie rolled his eyes, "It was nice out, must have fallen asleep waiting for her." Eddie lays his fingers over the hand Richie has on his chest.

"You're fingers are fucking icicles, Kaspbrak." Richie hisses, pulling

Eddie's fingers to his mouth and breathing on them.

"Fucking gross, I know you haven't brushed your teeth." Eddie grimaces a bit, but Richie can still see the smile hiding in the crease of his dimples.

"What are you gonna do about it?" Richie teases with a grin. Eddie squints at him for a moment before blowing a puff of air in Richie's face, making Richie flinch back. They both laugh before Richie leans back in, resting his head on Eddie's shoulder, ignoring the odd angle of his body.

"Thank you." Richie says.

"For what?" Eddie has his free arm wrapped around Richie's shoulders and a cheek pressed into his hair.

"Y'know just like," Richie looks down at their entwined fingers. "Being there? You left work early for me, and got on an airplane and you don't care that everyone knows you like it up the butt and you're my *partner* or whatever and...and you didn't divorce me when I yelled at you. You always take care of me and I just—"

"Hey," Eddie nudges Richie's head back with his chin and waits for Richie to meet his eyes before continuing. "You take care of me too, all the time. I don't care what anyone thinks, as long as I have you guys."

Richie stares up at him, committing every part of the image to his memory. He wishes he could bottle the warm flutter in his chest, the way it makes every nerve down to his toes tingle. Feeling so much after not feeling anything for so long will never not be overwhelming.

"I have to tell you something." He blurts out before he can stop it. Eddie squints at him with tired eyes. "Um...before...before that article came out? The detectives called me."

"What?" Eddie questions and now Richie can't look him in the eye.

"Yea," Richie says, rubbing the fabric of Eddie's sweater between his fingers. "He called me and told me that they were making the arrest before it happened. I didn't want to tell you."

“Why?” He’s desperately listening for a tint of hurt or anger or confusion in Eddie’s voice.

“You were just getting better, y’know? You started sleeping in bed with me again and letting me touch you and kiss you. He texted me and told me when they were making the arrest and we were eating dinner and I just...I looked up and you were eating with your fingers and drinking from a glass with water spots you were just so much better and I didn’t want to bring it back up. I told myself you didn’t need to know but...but I was wrong. I’m so fucking sorry, Eds.”

The words just start spilling out of his mouth before he can help them, and by the time he’s done, his breathing is stuttered and his fingers shake around Eddie’s sweater. Eddie doesn’t say anything for a moment, but Richie can hear his heartbeat beating faster in his chest. They sit in silence, and Richie closes his eyes against the nauseous guilt in his stomach.

“Rich.” Eddie says carefully. When he doesn’t continue, Richie accepts his fate and looks up. Eddie just looks tired. “I’m not mad.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Eddie shakes his head, but looks off to the side, searching for the words he wants to say. “But you should have told me. I deserved to know.”

“I know.” Richie nods. “I just...this whole time there’s been nothing I could do to help you. I couldn’t protect you from them, from the fucking media, or even from yourself. You struggled so fucking much with it and were just starting to get better and I just...it was the only thing I could protect you from. I didn’t know it would blow up like this, I just wanted to protect you from *something*.”

“And I love you for that.” Eddie nods along. “But I don’t need someone to protect me, Rich. All I need is for someone to be there for me, and you did that. I-I know I’m not the easiest person in the world to deal with, but Rich, you’re so patient with me, and *kind* and you know when to push me and when to let me move at my own pace. My mom and Myra, they wanted to protect me from things. I don’t want that from you.”

“God please don’t compare me to them.” Richie squeezes his eyes shut, trying not to let the comparison eat at him.

“Then don’t do shit like that, okay?” Eddie’s voice brings on a teasing tone and he slaps Richie’s back gently. He looks back up into Eddie’s face, nodding silently. The worry lines have relaxed again, and his eyes are fond and sincere. “Rich, you know I’d do almost anything for you, and I know you’d do anything for me; But I’m a grown man, I can handle these things. If I need help I’ll ask for it.”

“I know. I suck, sorry.” Richie says.

“You don’t suck. Don’t talk about my boyfriend like that.” Eddie mumbles with a smile, throwing his arm over Richie’s shoulders and pulling him tighter to his chest. Richie smiles, face warming at the term. They’ve strayed from terms like that, choosing the neutral *partner* when it was necessary, but Eddie using the term awakens some age-old crush in him.

“Boyfriend, huh?” he asks with a grin. Eddie blinks down at him and then smiles.

“Yea. Is that okay?”

“Yea, I like it.” He says sincerely, sharing a smile with him. “It makes me feel like a thirteen year old girl writing “Mrs. Edward Kaspbrak” surrounded by hearts in her notebook.”

“Shut up,” Eddie laughs, “Besides we both know that you **were** a thirteen-year-old drawing hearts in your notebooks.”

Richie’s reminded of how he liked to write cursive ‘E’s as a kid so he’d practice Eddie’s name when they learned cursive in grade school, adding a heart next to it before he realized only girls did that. The page in the back of his math notebook where he kept a list of songs to put on the a mix tape for Eddie and the doodles and drawings he’d put in the margins. Then, of course, the day he skipped school and took his swiss-army knife down to the kissing bridge to carve their initials into the wood there, desperate to show someone, anyone, how he felt. Wanting so badly to shout it from the rooftops but terrified everyone who looked at him somehow *knew* .

“Yea yea, shove it Eds. Didn’t you just say you’d do anything for me?” Richie teases.

“I said ‘almost.’” Eddie rolls his eyes, hiding a grin.

“Would you even kiss me with morning breath?” Richie raises an eyebrow. Eddie purses his lips, thinking for a moment.

“I suppose I’m whipped enough for that,” Eddie smiles, leaning down, pressing his lips to Richie’s. Richie smiles against his mouth.

Nothing else really matters. He has Eddie, alive and well, Holly is with them. The only people in the world that do matter are sleeping soundly in the house behind him and they love him. There’s a lot of havoc Richie’s self deprecation can wreak, but the undeniable truth is that their friendship, all of them, is greater than this. It’s an inevitable unbreakable bond woven into whatever fucking fabric of reality exists between them and the turtle. It spans gods and monsters. It’s real, as real as the cold on his fingertips and the snowflakes in Eddie’s hair. Everything else is inconsequential.

“Okay. I’m literally only wearing boxers. My dick is gonna fall off unless I go inside.” Richie pokes at Holly. “Besides, we gotta get this dog popsicle inside or she might not thaw right and I know how worried you get about salmonella.” Holly raises her head, licking Richie’s finger.

“We need to pack, our flight is in six hours.”

“Don’t remind me.”

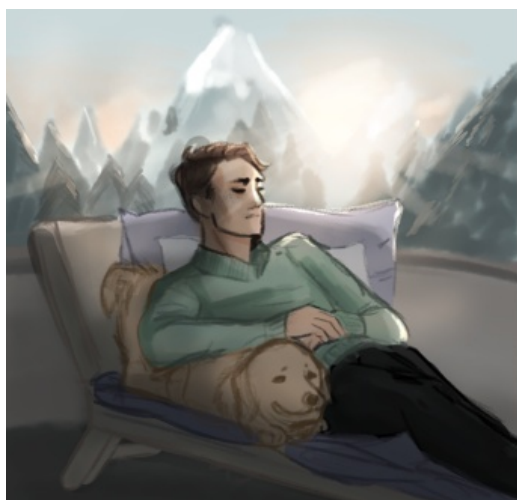
“No, cause if I don’t remind you, you won’t pack, we’ll miss our flight, Bill will murder you and then I’ll have to clean up another crime scene and you know I hate doing that..”

“You’re neurotic.”

“You love it.” Eddie grins.

“Unfortunately, you are correct Sir Kaspbrak. Now, pip-pip, we must wake the others, I require sustenance.” Richie whistles, and Holly scrambles to her feet.

“Ugh. You know I hate the british guy.”



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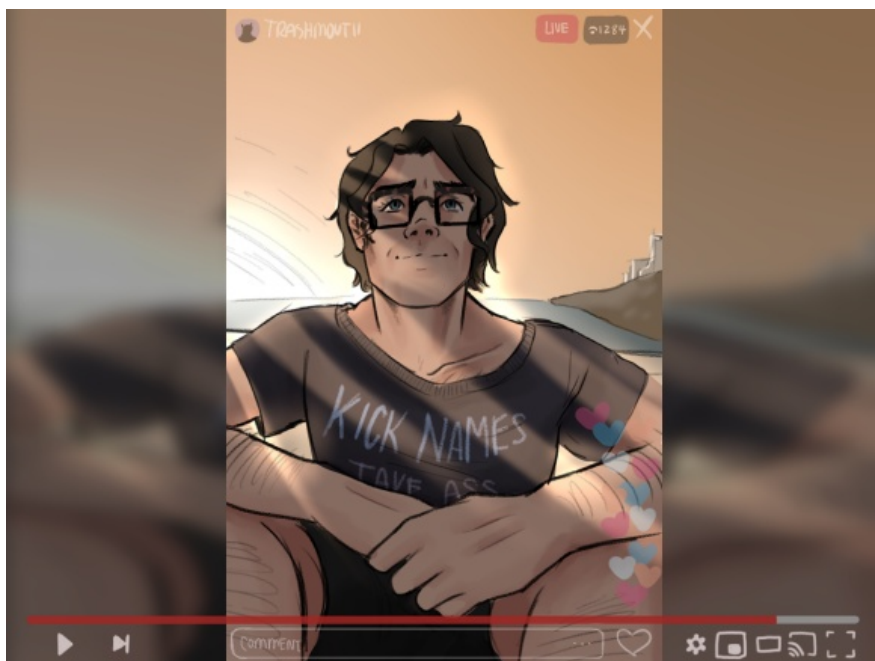
Notes for the Chapter:

TW: recreational drug use

Losers Club Time. I was going to have them have fun and drink, but they're all borderline alcoholics, so they just get high instead lol. Some much-needed fun times after all the shit these boys have been through recently, and Richie really did need to spend time with everyone after all of this. I tried to make sure each of the losers got their moment. Hope you all enjoy. Only one more chapter to go after this one!

Also I cannot draw dogs, but uh, I tried lmao

8. But your soul you must keep, totally free



Richie wakes up sweaty with Eddie breathing hot between his shoulder blades and sweat slick between their bodies. They're still in their street clothes, a testament to how tired Eddie was that he didn't change before getting into bed for a nap. Flying is always a lot for Eddie, but flying with Holly is especially stressful for both of them, luckily Bill flew with them so they had another person to watch her and help.

Richie lifts Eddie's hand from his waist, and slips out of the bed as quietly as he can. Eddie groans and rolls onto his stomach into the warm patch where Richie previously was. Richie checks his phone. It's only three in the afternoon, he'll let Eddie sleep a little more before waking him up. Eddie won't stop bitching if he screws up his sleep schedule.

He grabs Holly's leash from the foyer, and waits for her to come to him. Eddie Pavlov'd her into coming whenever she hears her leash so it doesn't take long. He throws on his slides before leaving the house to walk her. Even Holly is a little lethargic, probably still working off the melatonin they had to give her for the flight.

It's nice outside. There's a light breeze and it's still warm in LA for the season, so when they get back, Richie and decides to go sit out on the back porch. Holly joins him, jumping up onto the foot of the lounge chair while Richie sits cross-legged.

Richie always loved the ocean. He did pay a ridiculous amount of money to buy a beach house, afterall. In retrospect, maybe it was to remind himself of the Atlantic back in Maine, he always liked summer trips to the beach. But there was something...comforting about the ocean. The large expanse of it, the pure vastness of it always felt like an odd sort of familiar. He always felt like he was adrift in the ocean, alone for miles and miles, nobody around, above or below. All of those shows about being stranded in the ocean with absolutely no sight of humanity on the horizon were terrifying but...but that's what his life was like. Lonely.

But he got the losers back and Eddie's always here. Eddie doesn't let him drift out into the middle of the ocean anymore, he tethers him. It's like they've all been adrift, and they might not have solid ground, but all of them are tied to each other now. They might be lonely, different from everyone else, but now they have each other, all seven of them in their own strange little world.

Richie gets a buzz on his phone and looks down to see the text from Steve. Richie called him on the car ride home, they talked for pretty much the entire drive, and Steve relented and told Richie he'd come by the house and they'd talk about releasing a statement tomorrow. But he doesn't fucking want to. He's tired of statements and others regurgitating his words into vague, publication-friendly forms. He's just so fucking tired of the whole charade.

Fuck it.

'*Sorry Steve*' Richie thought, pulling his phone out of his back pocket and pulling up Instagram. He had to run into the kitchen and grab a

few cookbooks but he set them up on one of the side tables outside and sat down against the railing. He turned the camera on front-facing view and switched to a live video.

“Is this fucking thing on?” Richie asked himself, tapping the screen a couple times. He watched the view counter in the top right corner start to click by. “I’m gonna go get a glass of water, watch my dog for me. Holly don’t you dare knock this over.” Richie goes into the kitchen before he realizes there’s no alcohol in the house. With a groan, he actually does get a glass of water and downs half of it before he gets back outside.

“I’m back.” Richie watched the comments start to scroll by, and the view counter had ticked up around 1200. “Oh wow, okay, hey strangers.” He read a couple of the comments, a lot of heart emojis and rainbow flags, but also a couple of ‘homo’s’ thrown in.

“Okay, here’s the fucking deal, guys.” Richie plants his feet and brings his knees up to his chest, resting his elbows across his knees. “I...I don’t owe you shit, you know?” Richie looks at the camera, at the hearts fading in and out in the bottom right. “ know, I’m a celebrity, boo-fucking-hoo, I don’t get privacy. But honestly, this past year has been probably both the worst and best of my life?.” Richie rubs his hands over his face.

“I just...okay. I’m forty years old, forty-one maybe? I can’t remember. Do you know how hard it is to make such a big life change after forty fucking years? I’ve been so aggressively straight for so long that I got so turned around I didn’t even know where the closet door was. I look at my...at Eddie, and,” Richie breaks off with a bitter smile, “I can’t even call him my boyfriend sometimes because long ago I convinced myself that being...loving a man is bad but I love him so much, and I can’t even do that for him half the time?”

“This has been the hardest thing I’ve ever had to deal with, and to wake up one morning and have that choice taken from me? I mean like, they didn’t just open the closet door, they fucking pushed me out and told everyone where I’d been hiding all along.” Richie looks away with pursed lips, “Honestly, just fuck that reporter, fuck the gossip rags, fuck everyone on twitter who ‘knew all along’. I don’t know why it’s any of your guys’ fucking business whether I like dick

or pussy. If I wanted to share that, I would have, you know?

“And now? Now *I* have to explain *myself* ? You guys didn’t even have the decency to leave his name out of it? Literally the only thing I asked was that you fucking leave Eddie out of it, and what do you do? You go and out both of us at the same time? Two-for-one special.” Richie breaks off with a scoff and ventures a look at the screen and a couple of the comments there. There’s some sad emoji’s, a lot of hearts.

“I guess I’m making this to ask you to just leave it alone. For the first time in a long time, I’m *happy* . Well, I was before this anyhow. Eddie is the only reason I’m not lost in a bottle, or snorting coke off of some hot blonde lady in a club. The important people in my life knew, all of my friends, and they support me, and none of the rest of this really matters, you know? Not to say that to the people that have supported me, because I see you, and I cannot tell you how nice it is to see your comments. But everyone else? I’m going to keep doing the work I’ve been doing, and if people don’t want to watch my shit now that you know I take it up the ass, then good riddance. I don’t want to sell tickets to homophobes anyway.”

Richie watched some of the comments scroll, braced for horrible things but...but most of them aren’t? Of course there’s some slurs, he sees fag and sinner in there at some point, but there’s a lot of “I’m so proud of you”s’ and “Thank you”s’ and “I’m sorry”s’. Now that the impulse has worn off, Richie feels a little itchy.

“Rich?” Richie looks up and Eddie is standing in the arch of the sliding glass door, rubbing his face and yawning. He’s freshly showered and dressed in Richie’s “My heart will go on” fire skull shirt (that Eddie laughed at when he found in the laundry the first week.) Richie can’t help the grin that grows across his face.

“Yea, I’ll be in in a minute, Eds.” Eddie looks dubiously at the stack of cookbooks in front of Richie, but whistles for Holly and closes the door behind both of them.

“Yea,” Richie sighs to the camera with a lovesick smile, “I love him. And I guess at this point, if anyone has a problem with that, they can get fucked. Thanks for coming to my TED talk.”

“Richard Tozier.”

“Oh shit.”

“Language.”

“Hey Ma,” Richie says placatingly, stepping away from his desk. “Uh, how’s it goin?”

“Are you serious, Richard? I’ve been worried about you.” Maggie’s voice is tired. Richie tries not to feel guilty.

“I’m sorry, Ma. I just...things got busy, you know?” Richie scratches the back of his head and kicks a tennis ball down the hallway for Holly to chase after. Maggie sighs on the other end.

“I know, sweetie, you’re always busy.”

“Ma,” Richie whines, dragging out the syllable, “please don’t be like that.”

“Like what? Like a concerned mother? Your friend told me you’d call me back and that was almost a week ago.”

“I know, I know, I’m a bad son.” Richie wanders aimlessly down the hall and into the open living room.

“You’re not a bad son. I just...I was concerned. I was going to come out and see you, but you know how I hate-”

“-hate flying, right.”

“Richie.” Maggie says with another sigh. Richie can hear the sound of their old television playing in the background, birds chirping out of their sunroom, he can picture his mother standing near the island counter, her little dog lazing in the living room. “How are you doing, Rich?”

“Oh you know me, I-”

“No, Richie.” She cuts him off before he can even get going. “Be honest with your mother.”

“Damnit, Ma.” Richie says, pulling the phone away for a moment to rub a hand over his face. Deep breaths. “I...okay so you know everything?”

“I do watch the news, sweetie.”

“Okay so...I don’t know how to tell you this but you’re not getting grandbabies, Ma.” Richie says, unable to get the actual words he wants to say out.

“Don’t be ridiculous, son.” Maggie scoffs on the other end. “There’s lots of options for *the gays* these days.”

“Jesus mom, don’t fucking say it like that.” Richie hisses, plopping down on the couch.

“Like what?” She asks, entirely innocently. Richie rolls his eyes, and tries to breathe through the panicked tightening of his chest.

“Just...don’t say ‘the gay’s, it’s kind of offensive.”

“How is that offensive?” He can picture her face, eyebrows pinched like Eddie, leaning on the counter, exacerbated expression.

“I don’t know it just is. Just don’t say it like that. Please?” Richie asks, and then mutters as an afterthought, “besides I don’t even know if I am gay.”

“What do you mean you don’t know?” Her voice lacks all of the punch his mind is trying to listen for.

“Y’know, I’ve had girlfriends before, and I liked them but this thing with Eddie it’s...I’ve never had anything like this.” Richie plays with the little pills of fleece on Holly’s blanket that’s draped across the couch.

“You love him?” Her question is simple, and the answer is an

admission. He should think about it more, should have more hesitation in saying it, but this is the one question he is crystal clear about.

“So much.”

“And he loves you? He makes you happy?”

“Yea.” The word is choked coming out of his mouth, and he kind of feels like he can’t breathe.

“Okay. Well, you bring that boy back home with you for Christmas okay? I haven’t seen him since he was waist high and that crazy mother of his practically kept him in bubble wrap”

Richie’s dubious. He’s anticipated this conversation for as long as he can remember and it’s just...it’s so easy? He’s agonized over this, he would sit at dinner as a teenager and just think about blurting it out, he thought about bringing a boy home and his father kicking him out of the house he’s thought about his mother packing a bag for him and sending him off to *camp* , he’s thought-

“You’re not mad?” His voice is quiet even to his own ears, and he’s stuck looking down at his fingers, chest tight waiting for the backlash.

“Honey, why would I be mad?” Maggie’s voice is uncharacteristically soft.

“I don’t know, I always expected you and dad would be upset.”

“Richie.” She says, sounding a little disbelieving. There’s silence for just long enough for Richie’s heart to begin screaming again before she continued. “You know, ever since you were a little boy, you’ve always gotten so sad sometimes. You cried a lot as a boy, I remember picking you up from daycare in tears because they had read the Giving Tree to you and you were just devastated over it. You clung to me all night, and you wanted to sleep in our bed and I felt so bad for you, I let you sleep with me. You’ve always had a big heart, Rich, but the older you got, you would get just as sad but you wouldn’t reach out to me, or anyone anymore. You just shut yourself away.

“I know you’ve been lonely. I...I’ve worried about you a lot over the years. So I might not get it, but if you’ve found someone that makes you happy? Then I’m happy for you. I love you and I don’t care if it’s a man or a woman, I just want you to be happy.”

Richie twists the speaker away from his mouth and tries to breathe through the tightness of his throat and the burning of tears in his eyes. Fuck. His breath is shaky, and he knows she can probably hear him but his heart is pounding and he needs to just calm down.

“What about dad?” He says, unable to hide the tears from his voice.

“Your father loved you so much, honey. I won’t say we never suspected this. Your father and I did talk about it a bit over the years, and it never mattered to us. Went wanted you to have a good life, Richie. He worked hard so you could have a happy life, we both did. I know for a fact he would be proud of you. In fact, I’m sure he’s watching us now.”

Richie wasn’t going to cry (he’s so fucking tired of crying) but Maggie’s voice got choked the moment she mentioned his dad and he couldn’t help the burning behind his eyes. He swallowed back against his tight throat, trying to be as silent as he could so he wouldn’t upset her more.

“I’m glad you finally got your head out of your ass, Oh idiot child of mine.” Richie says in the Voice of his father, the first voice he learned how to do perfectly. He can hear his mom laugh through her tears and he laughs along with her.

He’s never been one for religion, Jesus and Moses and all that shit. Pennywise in all of his Eldritch god glory kind of tainted any idea of a higher power outside of the damn Turtle (and look what happened to him.) But he does like to imagine his dad is out there somewhere, in whatever energy exists outside of the world they know, and he hopes he is proud. He hopes.

“I love you, Ma.” Richie says gently, breaking the silence.

“I love you too, Richard.” Maggie agrees, and Richie can hear the smile in her voice. “Now I do want grandchildren before I die though,

so we'll talk about that when you come home for Christmas."

"Maaaa."

"What are you doing here, Rich?" Bill asks, crossing his arms and leaning back against his desk. Richie makes his way over to the bay window in Bill's study, making himself comfortable with one of the throw pillows clutched in his hands.

"You're a writer, right?" Bill blinks, and then gestures around the room lined with floor-to-ceiling bookcases.

"I think so, although if you ask Audra, not a very good one."

"Bullshit, she loves your books." Richie waves Bill's self deprecation off.

"Anyway, I know you're not here for a social call so-

"How do you know that?" Richie protests, "I could be here for a social call, maybe I just missed you."

"Rich, when you miss me you call me from the toilet and describe - in detail - any new bump or scab or vein or gray hair you've found on your body, and more often than not it's about your dick."

"Well, it's not like I can tell Eddie, now can I?" Richie rolls his eyes, "Dude would have a coronary if he knew a couple of my pubes were going gray."

"...I can't believe I'm asking this, but don't you think he'll notice." Bill's face is adorably pink.

"You know, surprisingly, when Eddie wants to fuck he's pretty single-minded. Doesn't really stop to smell the roses."

"Yep. I knew I didn't want to know." Bill snorts, "Anyway. Seriously,

what's with the house call?"

"...you sure you don't want to hear more about my dick? I think I-"

"Rich."

"Right, sorry. Deflecting, I know." Richie rolls his eyes and makes a vague gesture with his hand. "So, I may have written something."

"Like, comedy stuff?" Bill sits down on the edge of his desk.

"Yea, it's uh, kinda? It's a little uh...argh. I don't know man. There's too much comedy for my therapist, too much Pennywise for my agent." Richie reaches down and pulls his laptop out of his bag.

"Okay. And how can I help with that?" Bill's very clearly tip-toeing around the issue. Richie appreciates it.

"I want you to like...read it? I don't want to show Eddie yet, and he typos at an alarmingly frequent rate so he's not a good option for this anyway." Richie twists his screen and shows Bill the word document.

"You want me to read it?"

"Yea," Richie gets up and stands in front of Bill, laptop clutched tight in his hands. "Read it and tell me if it's shit, and also maybe help me edit out the Pennywise shit when it gets too real. I kinda wanna do something with this and I don't think the world is ready for that bitch."

"Sure." Bill holds his hands out for the laptop. Richie glares at his hands and purses his lips before finally giving in and shoving the laptop into Bill's hands. "Just like, if you hate it don't tell me. No do tell me. No!...you're not allowed to hate it, how about that?"

"I'm not gonna hate it, Rich." Bill rolls his eyes and sits down at his desk chair. He scrolls through the document for a moment before his eyes widen. "Richie this is thirty pages long."

"Yea, uh. My therapist wanted me to like, journal some shit, and then it turned into this fucking monster. It's kinda incoherent."

Bills puts on his reading glasses and scrolls up to the top of the document.

“You’re gonna read it now?!” Richie tries to grab the laptop back but Bill swats his hands away.

“I thought the house call implied you wanted it done now.” Bill raised his eyebrows at Richie.

“Fine.” Richie grabbed his messenger bag and patted his pockets down for his wallet and keys. “I’m not gonna stick around while you read it though. I don’t hate myself that much.” Richie began to storm out of Bill’s office when Bill shouted after him.

“Richie!” A moment later, Richie poked his head back in the door, still pouting. “You forgetting something?”

“Don’t you like, need it or something?” Richie scratched at the back of his neck.

“Rich. You can just email it to me, you know? You do know how email works, right?”

“Shit. Fuck. Shut up, give me my laptop back.”

“-and I swear to god I will fucking disown you if you talk to anyone about my ass or my dick. You even mention anything sex related and I’m fucking leaving you and I’m taking Holly with me and-”

“For fucks sake dude, just breathe.” Richie rolls his eyes, and takes Eddie’s coat from him with a grin. “I promise not to embarrass you too much in front of your co-workers.”

“Fine.” Eddie pouted, his permanently worried expression somehow drawn up with even more tension. Richie pressed a slow, gentle kiss to the top of Eddie’s cheekbone.

"It's gonna be okay." He says quietly, "but if you don't want to do this I can just go home and-"

"No." Eddie grabs Richie's forearm, thumbing the strip of exposed wrist there. "I want you here I'm just...I'm just being crazy."

"Don't talk about my boyfriend like that." Richie teases and then turns to the hostess about their coats. Eddie shakes out his hands, trying to expel some of the nervous energy before entering the room.

Their office had rented out a small performance space at a local restaurant for their non-denominational holiday party. Last year Eddie came to this alone, nervous and very neurotic, and at every other office gathering he's pretty much just showed up, said his hellos and then ducked out before anyone could ask him too many questions.

"Edward." Eddie looks up and Ted's crossing the room towards him, clad in an adorable christmas sweater and with his wife on his arm. "You remember Alice?"

"Of course," Eddie tries to smile against the nerves, shaking her hand and letting Ted clap him on the shoulder.

"I thought you said you were going to bring your man," Ted looked a little disappointed.

"To be fair, I never agreed to that." Eddie barely finishes the sentence when something presses against his back. His heart momentarily fucking stops and he jumps, a hand flying to his chest. "Jesus Christ."

"Are you gonna be high strung like this all night?" Richie grins and then flinches when Eddie hits him lightly in the arm.

"Shut. Up." Eddie spits sternly, glaring at Richie.

"Holy Shit he's real." Ted remarks, and he's not even trying to hide his amusement. Eddie rolls his eyes, and gestures to Richie.

"Ted, this is my boyfriend, Richie. Rich, this is-"

"Yes, Ted. I have heard so much about you." Richie's tone is dripping

with sarcasm that is thinly veiled to Eddie, but Ted doesn't even seem to register it. He shakes hands with Richie, clasping Richie's between both of his before gesturing to Alice.

"Richie, in the flesh. I wish I could say the same, but Eddie here has been pretty tight lipped about the whole thing. I didn't think you actually existed for a while there, I'm sure I lost one of the bets going on around the office. Anyway, my wife, Alice." Eddie tenses at Ted's words, glaring wide-eyed at Richie. Richie just smiles kindly at Alice and greets her, bending down to shake her hand and press a kiss to her cheek.

"It's very nice to meet you." Richie says genuinely to the short woman and then stands back up. Relieved that Richie's not going to say it, Eddie relaxes when Richie wraps an arm around his back. Except, Richie then leans over and says through a smile, "Not the only thing about you that's tight."

Eddie's going to kill him. The smile he gives Richie is tight-lipped and snide. "I hate you." he says under his breath, a fake smile masking the words. Richie pulls him even closer with an amused grin.

"You two are just so darling." Alice says, leaning into Ted's side.

"Thank you, I think so too." Richie presses his free hand to Eddie's chest and smiles at him. Eddie tries to relax a little but he can see some of the people around them turning to look at Richie and gets tense all over again.

"Richard, your shirt is so fun, I love it." Alice gestures at Richie's shirt.

It's an eyesore, to be perfectly fucking frank, but Richie insisted. Richie pulls the lapels of his sweater back to reveal the rest of the shirt underneath. It's some monstrosity with a pattern of vibrant rainbow reindeer across the button-up that Eddie definitely put in the "you're not allowed to wear this" pile this morning.

"Oh, thank you Alice, Eddie hates it." Richie smiles over at Eddie.

"It's tacky." Eddie bites out, arms crossed.

“Babe, don’t be like that.” Richie bumps their shoulders together, and Ted and Alice both laugh.

“Be like what?” Eddie asks, “I told you not to wear that this morning.”

Before Richie can answer, Ted throws his head back with a very loud laugh, which makes Richie and Alice also laugh. Eddie can feel warmth in his cheeks, and tries to bite down on the instinct to snap at them. He’s “working on his anger issues” and he personally thinks he deserves a gold fucking star for how good he’s being right now. Eddie lets himself lean into Richie’s side and press his face into the fabric of his sweater.

“Yea, that sounds like Eddie.” Ted claps Richie on the shoulder.

So the party isn’t the *worst* thing Eddie’s ever had to suffer through. Socializing is smooth like butter with Richie there. Richie is always so good at dispelling tension and keeping a conversation going. “Social lubricant” Bev had called him on their summer vacation. (Bev and Eddie had been sitting on the dock watching Richie schmooze effortlessly with Audra, Patty, and Sarah.)

Eddie stays glued to Richie’s side for most of the evening. There’s a small speech from the Engagement Committee and a couple funny awards delivered to people for things like ugliest sweater (“You didn’t tell me there were awards.” “Because your wardrobe is embarrassing enough.”) before they start playing songs and some of the younger employees go out to the dance floor to sing and dance along.

“C’mon Eds, dance with me.”

“Absolutely not.” Eddie sips at his Gin and glares at Richie.

“Not fair, I want to have fun.” Richie tries to pout his way out of it but Eddie refuses.

“Fine. I’m going to go get a drink.” Riche sighs and stands up from the table, but Eddie grips his wrist.

“Rich.” He starts, unsure how to finish the sentence in a room full of

people. Richie smiles gently and leans down to kiss him quickly.

“Don’t worry, I’ll just get soda.”

“Promise?” Eddie tightens his grip, searching Richie’s face for any signs.

“I promise. Now dance with me or let go.” Eddie let’s go but watches Richie make his way over to the bar. Maia is standing there and she almost spits her drink out when Richie smiles over at her. Scoffing, Eddie turns back to the table and pulls his phone out. He usually leaves the party way before this. He jumps when someone sits down heavily next to him, but surprised to find Ted instead of Richie.

“Hey, Ted.” Eddie says tiredly, putting his phone away.

“How’s it goin’, man?” Ted smiles at him.

“Well, Richie’s here, so suffice to say I’m exhausted.” Eddie spits it out with sarcasm, but the fond look Ted gives him makes Eddie avert his gaze down to his hands, smiling. “I don’t know, he’s a lot more social than I am. I’m kinda ready to leave, but if I leave it up to him we’ll be here until close.”

“I like him.” Ted takes a sip of his beer.

“That’s a little surprising. He’s got some serious foot-in-mouth disease.” Eddie rolls his eyes with a fond smile.

“He’s fun.” Ted nudges Eddie, “Alice likes him, said to bring him next time you come over for dinner.”

“The idea of Richie at a formal dinner is funnier than any joke he’s ever said in his career.” Eddie scoffs. He searches for Richie at the bar and finds him telling some jokes to Maia and the other kids on front desk crew. Maia’s laughing with a hand on his arm. Eddie rolls his eyes. “He certainly seems popular though.”

Ted glances over, chuckling. They both turn back to the drinks in front of them, Eddie swishing his gin around his tumbler, Ted sipping on his beer as they let the silence settle.

"I think he's good for you. You're so fucking uptight, you need a laugh every once and a while."

"Ted!" Eddie looks at Ted, shocked with betrayal. "Fuck you, dude."

"What, am I wrong?" Ted shrugs, "When you first started you were so fucking nervous and anxious all the time, I thought you were going to murder someone or have a mental breakdown. You're *still* anxious all the time, but I can tell he helps you relax. It's a good thing, kid, don't worry." Ted claps Eddie on the shoulder.

"Ted, you're like, barely a decade older than me, do you really get to call me kid?"

"Yea, I think so." Ted smiles and both of them break eye contact to laugh.

"Yea, maybe he is good for me." Eddie laments.

"That's how I am with Alice, y'know? Except she's the one that's gotta crack the whip, keep me in line, keeps me grounded."

Eddie opens his mouth to respond but the song playing switches over to a painfully familiar melody. "Oh No no no." Eddie almost spits his drink, setting it down and looking over at the bar for Richie in a panic.

"*I-*" Richie's voice is right in his ear and Eddie jumps three fucking feet again. He grabs for Richie, but Richie jumps back, attempting (and failing at) the run on the opening syllable.

"Richie, no!" Eddie jumps to his feet. Richie steps backwards carefully avoiding Eddie, shit-eating grin on his face.

"*-don't want a lot for Christmas -*" Richies singing voice is adorably off-key, but Eddie cannot let this happen.

"Rich, I'm serious."

"*-there is just one thing I need-*" Richie darts around a table to put some space between them as Eddie swipes at him. Eddie loses his balance and has to slam on the table to keep upright.

“ *-I don't care about the presents-* ”

“Rich!” Eddie looks around at the amused crowd they’ve gathered, face flushed red.

“ *-underneath the Christmas tree-* ” Richie’s voice cracks dramatically and Eddie can’t help but laugh. He manages to grab the corner of Richie’s sweater.

“ *I just want you for my own* ,” Richie turns to him now, hand holding up an invisible mic, one hand to his ear and face screwed up like an asshole. Eddie grabs his sweater “There’s people here, don’t do this.” Eddie tries to talk over him, but Richie turns right to him, grabbing his face and singing the next line “ *more than you could ever know.*”

The small “please” Eddie gets out loses its effect through his laugh. “ *-Make my wish come true-* ” Richie grins and wraps his arms around Eddie doing a hilariously pathetic attempt at a vocal run. Richie’s got his arms around Eddie’s shoulder, cheeks pressed together as he finishes “ *All I want for Christmas is*” Richie kisses Eddie’s cheek, “you .”

Eddie can’t fight the grin so he just turns in Richie’s arms and hides his face in Richie’s neck as his coworkers laugh and a couple of them clap at the show. Richie sways them back and forth, and keeps singing a little under his breath as Eddie breaks into laughter against his neck.

“You’re the worst.” Eddie says, pursing his lips to try and hide his smile. Richie ducks in and steals a kiss.

“But you love me.”

“Unfortunately.”

Richie gasps in mock offense, and poking at Eddie’s sides and making him choke on his laughter.

The song slows down, fading into another familiar tune. Richie shifts them, grabbing one of Eddie’s hands, and beginning to gently sway back and forth. Eddie gives in, putting one hand in Richie’s, grabbing his arm with the other, letting Richie lead them into a slow dance as

Bing Crosby sings *White Christmas* .

“Was this your grand scheme to get me to dance with you?” Eddie teases.

“Nah, I just wanted to get your head out of your ass. This is certainly a bonus though.” Richie’s voice has dropped into that private tone between them. Eddie focuses on him, lets the rest of the office drift into his periphery, and just *looks* at Richie.

Sometimes, when Richie’s high off of the adrenaline off a show, or a really good bit, he gets like this. Open and honest and earnest. It’s what got them here in the first place, Richie too keyed up after his show and wanting to “ *kiss the shit out of* ” Eddie in that alley. Eddie was just as eager, but he was always eager when Richie got like this. Richie didn’t let himself do this a lot, so Eddie always grabbed at the opportunity.

Eddie leans in, pressing a gentle kiss to Richie’s mouth. Richie responds, and it’s chaste, but so sweet it makes Eddie’s breath catch in his chest. He presses his forehead to Richie’s for a moment, letting out a shaky breath. The moment was a little overwhelming, so he lay his head on Richie’s shoulder instead, closing his eyes and letting Richie guide them as the song faded out.

They’re laying in bed and Eddie’s got work in the morning, but he won’t put his fucking phone away. Richie, who turns nocturnal if there’s nothing to keep him in line, is uncharacteristically tired.

“For fucks sake dude, put your phone away.” Richie reaches over for Eddie’s phone, but Eddie turns on his side, shifting his phone out of Richie’s grip. Richie grabs one of Eddie’s hips and drags both of the towards the center of the bed. “What are you even doing? Emails can wait for morning.”

“Nothing.” Eddie mutters, “I’ll turn the brightness down.”

“Just go to sleep, Eds.” Richie hooks his chin over Eddie’s bony ass shoulder and tries to squint at the phone as Eddie angles the screen away from him. “Dude, I can’t see six inches in front of my face, I can’t read your screen anyway, calm down.”

“Fine.” Eddie says, shuffling back a bit to fit more comfortably against Richie. He brings his free hand to rest on Richie’s, stroking over the fingers settled over his hip.

“If you’re going to keep me up at least tell me what you’re doing?” Richie mutters into Eddie’s neck.

“I will if you promise not to be a bitch about it.”

“Moi? I’m offended Edward.”

“Don’t fucking call me Edward, you weirdo.” Eddie nudges his elbow into Richie’s side.

“The Twilight era must have been hard for you, huh?”

Eddie snorts and then drops the phone to put a hand over his face as he laughs. Richie tickles his side to keep him laughing, but lets Eddie pull his hand away, twining their fingers together and dragging them over his stomach as he settles.

“You’re a fucking menace, dude.” Eddie turns his head to smile at Richie over his shoulder. “Is that like, a thing you never told me about? Should I cover myself in body glitter and pout? Is that what gets you going?”

“Maybe I just liked his name.” Richie smiles. Eddie’s close enough that Richie can see his face clearly, the brush of his eyelashes against his cheek, the small dotting of freckles over his shoulder that come out with the sun, the deep-set dimples. “Was that an offer though? The body glitter? Cause I could-”

“No!” Eddie scoffs and rolls his eyes, smiling. “That shit gets everywhere dude, it’d get all over our room and I’m not explaining to my coworkers why my work clothes are covered in stripper glitter.”

“Fine.” Richie says, popping a kiss on Eddie’s cheek, “Roleplay

dreams crushed. Please continue this thing that I'm going to bitch about."

"I'm just on twitter, it's no big deal."

"Ed, we said no twitter." Richie scoffs. He tries to pull his hand away from Eddie's but Eddie's tightens his grip on Richie's fingers, so he just gently bites Eddie's shoulder instead.

"Ow! Asshole," Eddie looked at his shoulder with a pout and then blew a puff of air into Richie's face again, making him recoil back. "I'm gonna have to get like, a rabies shot now, who knows where your mouth's been."

"I think you know damn well where my mouth's been, Kaspbrak." Richie says into Eddie's ear, pulling him back against his body and rolling his hips.

"Ugh, shut up. I'm too tired for sex." Eddie huffed.

"C'mon, you don't even have to move, I'll do all the work from right here." Richie said, pressing a kiss to the crux of Eddie's jaw.

"You're just trying to get me off of twitter and it's not going to work." Eddie says. Despite his words, he still angles his head to give Richie access to his neck. Richie blows a raspberry into the side of Eddie's neck, both of them laugh in response.

"No, I'm just trying to *get you off* , babe. But fine, why are you on twitter?"

"Just looking at what people are saying." Eddie shrugs. Richie leans over Eddie's shoulder, squinting at the screen, trying to look at what Eddie's scrolling through.

"Why?"

"I don't know," Eddie shrugs, "I read some buzzfeed article and it said you were trending on twitter and I wanted to look."

"I didn't even know you had a twitter account?" Richie says.

“Well, I don’t like...tweet. I made one forever ago and mostly just lurk. Here, I like this one: *“Get you someone that looks at you the way Trashmouth looks at his boyfriend.”* Eddie reads, opening the photo and bringing it closer for Richie to see. It’s him from the Instagram video, legs crossed and smiling up at Eddie off screen like he hung the moon and the stars.

“Where, oh where, will I get a man like that?” Richie says, burying his warm face in Eddie’s neck.

“I don’t know, but give up now, Holly’s too attached, she won’t cope well if we separate.” Eddie says teasingly, rubbing his thumb across Richie’s knuckles where they’re still resting on his stomach.

“Oh no, If you want away you’ll have to pry me off with a crowbar Eds, I’m not going anywhere.” The moment the words came out, Richie knew he put too much self deprecation into that one. Eddie looked over his shoulder at that, eyebrows pinched.

“Good. I don’t want anyone else.” Eddie’s serious tone makes Richie want to hide his face. Instead he just swallows and pulls his grimace into a pathetic attempt at a smile.

“Wow, samesies.” He says back.

Eddie rolls his eyes but kisses Richie anyway.

“I love you, asshole.”

“I know.”

Richie watches Eddie scroll for a bit, blurry words and splashes of color going fast over his screen. Eddie opens a tweet with a photo attached and then quickly exits out of it with a disgusted scoff.

“Wait, what was that?” Richie asks.

“Nothing,” Eddie tries to exit out of the app, but Richie pulls his hand from Eddie’s and grabs the phone, looking for the same colors that he saw on the article. He has to bring the phone right in front of his face to look at it, but this time he rolls over so Eddie has to drape across his back to try and reach the phone. Unluckily for Eddie, Richie has

longer arms, so he simply holds it out of Eddie's reach.

"Fucking dickhead, stop." Eddie stretches for the phone, but Richie grabs the extended hand and cradles it to his chest. "Ugh." Eddie drops his face to Richie's shoulder.

"Oh, Eds," Richie smiles once he brings the phone close enough to see. He only has to scroll for a moment before he sees the article and opens it. "*Ten times Richie Tozier was cute with his boyfriend and we didn't realize*"

The first photo was a pap photo of Richie and Eddie at the farmer's market from when Eddie first moved out here. Richie looked like a greasy mess in a ratty t-shirt with slides and a mockery of a ponytail, whereas Eddie was perfect in his tight little jeans and button-up, yelling at Richie over the right apples to buy.

"Richie stooooop." Eddie whined.

"Eds, this is cute," Richie says with a smile. The second post is a gif from Holly's instagram. Richie had recorded Eddie when he first started teaching her commands and you can see Eddie, barefoot and in basketball shorts, training Holly to sit. The posts vary from Eddie in the background of Richie's snapchats, to a blurry photo of them at a restaurant or LAX, to a grainy photo of them at a Kesha concert. But the last one gives Richie pause.

It's a group photo taken from their summer vacation that Bill had posted on his instagram. They were all in their swim gear posed on the boat they had rented to sail out onto the lake and watch the fireworks. Patty and Stan held hands, Mike stood at the steering with his girlfriend Sarah, Bev was in Ben's lap and Bill had an arm around Audra and Richie. Eddie, with too much sunscreen, an unbuttoned shirt over his (too short) swim shorts, and a sun visor was drawn up in the seat next to Richie, leaning against his side with one of Richie's arms over his chest. To the average viewer, they all probably looked like friends, but even the buzzfeed article went on to point out "*They were super cute the whole time and we never knew. #couplegoals*"

Richie, the idiot that he was, ventured into the comments beneath the post.

"I just love them and I'm so happy for Richie." one post read, with a crying emoji after it.

"I feel so bad for them, but they're also so cute. Guilt shipping lmao"

"They seem so happy." was all that one of them said, and Richie read it a couple times before locking the phone.

He rolled onto his back and wrapped his arm around Eddie's shoulders, pulling him against his chest. Eddie looked tired and a little confused and Richie just wanted to kiss the crease between his brows, but he settled for staring at him, cataloguing every crease, every dimple, every eyelash and every fleck of warmth in his deep brown eyes.

"I'm glad people know how happy I am with you." Richie says, pushing down the nerves that came along with such a statement.

"Me too." Eddie smiles, pulling up to kiss Richie. "Besides, now we can go to dinner and I can like, hold your hand."

"Woah there, I'm am a dignified lady, the suitor must woo me before holding my hand." Richie slipped into a southern Voice and Eddie rolled his eyes.

"I've had my dick up your ass, I think the time for woo-ing has come and gone."

"Touche." Richie nods with a grin and then releases Eddie and pushes him a little bit over back onto his side of the bed. "Now go to sleep. You're cranky if you don't get at least seven hours."

"Fuck you."

"Hey, I offered you said no." Eddie slaps his back before pushing Richie onto his side and spooning back up behind him. Richie grabs his hand, sliding their fingers back together against his chest and settles in to sleep.

He watches the moonlight dance across the waves out of the bay windows in the bedroom. The curtains are on a timer to close before sunrise because Richie loves the sea, but fucking hates sunlight in the

mornings. The water moves in the darkness, and there's a certain thrilling mystery to the deep dark waters that he's spent years contemplating.

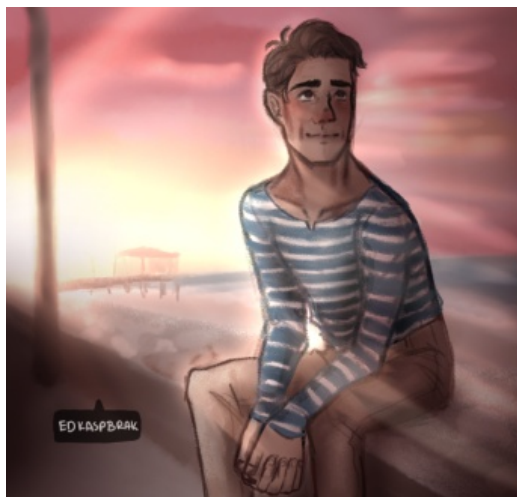
Holly's asleep at the foot of their bed, Eddie's breathing has settled and his breath is warm against Richie's back, his fingers slack in Richie's grip.

Richie longs to show his childhood self this image full of happiness and content and *love*. He wants to show the boy in Derry crying quietly into his pillow at night that things would work out. That boy, so desperately in love and ashamed of it, needed to know that the friend he spent a whole summer making the perfect mix-tape for, *could* love him back, that he *can* be happy. He *will* be happy. What would his life have been like if someone had told him it would be okay? That he wasn't wrong or broken. That it gets better.

Then again, Richie always hated that bullshit saying. "It gets better." Yea, maybe, but that doesn't make the present hurt any less. It doesn't make your hands stop shaking when kids at school whisper about how you're a *fag* . It doesn't make it any less terrifying when you get caught staring at the boy you have a crush on, doesn't lessen the horror of being *known* , of being found out.

But things do get better. Time passes, the world moves on, society shifts. People of all walks of life die and fight and bleed for it but eventually you're not such a freak. The world doesn't hate you as much and the universe isn't out to get you. *The turtle can help if you let it*. Your secret isn't *dirty* , and you have to wade through way too much sewer water to do it, but eventually you'll realize it isn't wrong to love. To be loved.

Eventually, you learn to love yourself, and if you let other people in, you'll learn what it's like to be loved back.



TRASHMOUTH Follow

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TRASHMOUTH AS A KID SEAGULLS
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ADD A COMMENT...

POST

Notes for the Chapter:

Ugh. This is the last chapter and I'm very emo over it. Thank you to everyone that has been with my through the whole process, and everyone that has read each chapter and encouraged me to keep posting. I was really nervous to post this fic, I always thought I had really bad writing, but your guys' response to this has just been so kind and awesome and I just can't thank you enough for encouraging me. Everyone that has commented on this has really fueled me to continue posting and continue writing. Thank you. <3

It was important to me that this wasn't just "their love heals them", but It's all of their love, all seven of them, that helps Richie put himself on the road to healing. And that's not the same for all of them, for Eddie, Richie is usually enough, but Eddie also started his healing journey long before this fic started. Yes, this is a Reddie fic, but they are all so incredibly important to each other. In a pretty gray-area way, poly losers club rights.

There's kind of an addendum/Book End to this that I've thought about but haven't written yet. If people

are interested, I will work on that, but it's not a sequel or anything, the fic really ends here.

Anyway, Thank you all so much

- <3 Kory

Author's Note:

It's nothing personal Missouri, you just had a big enough city and were bible-belty enough for my purposes. <3

Fic and Chapter Titles are from *Awake My Soul* by Mumford and Sons

Anyway, let me know what you think!

As always thank you to [Annie](#) for being my Best Friend & Beta / reading this and dealing with me.

Also thank you to everyone in the Reddie server who dealt with me writing this lmao

I can be found at [Koryandr](#) on tumblr